MORAL ARTICULATION

On the Development of New Moral Concepts

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This is the penultimate draft of a book manuscript forthcoming with Oxford University Press (expected in late 2023 or early 2024).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

For K and T, with love.

Acknowledgments

I have been continually grateful for the support of many friends, family members, colleagues, teachers, and students who helped and encouraged me as I wrote this book. The idea for this project first began to conglomerate while I was living in New York City and Berlin, first as a graduate student at the New School for Social Research and then at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin with the support of a DAAD research fellowship. I thank my teachers and mentors at those institutions who guided this project through its initial stages. Alice Crary's unwavering support as an advisor, along with the philosophical inspiration provided by her teaching and writing, shaped this book in more ways than I can say. I am especially fortunate that today, years later, she is not only a mentor but a friend and collaborator. Jay Bernstein's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* have never been far from my mind in writing this book, and his generous mentorship has continued to the present, discussing iterations of this project at nearly every stage over the years. I am grateful to Linda Martín Alcoff for the insight she provided on earlier versions of the material presented here. Rahel Jaeggi, my host while at Humboldt, not only gave me the opportunity to test out some of these ideas in her Colloquium for Social Philosophy but was the first to suggest that I turn to Charles Taylor's notion of articulation to express ideas I was then trying to formulate.

Writing in earnest began as I started a new job in the philosophy department at Vanderbilt University. I thank my colleagues there for a warm welcome and their ongoing encouragement. I received valuable institutional support from Vanderbilt while writing this book, including being granted a research leave in the 2022–2023 academic year, giving me time to complete the final manuscript, and funding from the College of Arts & Science Dean's

Research Studio, which came at a crucial time in the revisions process. My thinking on several of the issues discussed here was shaped by discussions in my graduate seminars on moral psychology and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. I thank the students in those classes for their insight and lively conversation. I also wish to thank the past and current members of our department's ethics reading group, *Ethcetera*, and especially my co-organizer and friend, Diana Heney, for many additional inspirating conversations.

As I revised the final manuscript, I was fortunate to be able to work with the critical feedback of several colleagues and friends who generously read the penultimate draft, including Jay Bernstein, Alice Crary, Miranda Fricker, Jonathan Gingerich, Robert Gooding-Williams, Francey Russell, and Robert Stern. I am also grateful to many friends and colleagues who, whether through conversation, encouragement, or critical feedback on individual chapters, contributed to improving the book. This includes Scott Aikin, Roy Ben-Shai, Dick Bernstein, Jacob Blumenfeld, Kenneth Boyd, Susan Brison, Janna van Grunsven, Logi Gunnarsson, Hilkje Hänel, Sally Haslanger, Diana Heney, Daniel James Ţurcaş, Lukas Kübler, Thomas Khurana, Elijah Millgram, Charles Mills, Andreja Novakovic, Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr., Dirk Quadflieg, Eva von Redecker, Matteo Santarelli, Justo Serrano, Rob Talisse, Paul C. Taylor, Tullio Viola, Margaret Urban Walker, and Rocío Zambrana. Thanks, as well, to the members of an online Iris Murdoch reading group, organized by Mark Hopwood, which provided crucial intellectual community during the early phases of the pandemic.

Most of what follows is published here for the first time. An exception is Chapter 3, which includes a reworking of material originally published as, "Creative Resentments: The Role of Emotions in Moral Change," *Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 273 (2018): 739–757. Chapter 5 contains overlap with my argument in "Changing Our Nature: Ethical Naturalism, Objectivity, and History," *Philosophy* 98, no. 3 (2023). Thanks to the journals for permission to

reuse this material. I am grateful to my editor at Oxford University Press, Lucy Randall, for expertly guiding me through the publication process. Thanks, as well, to Katherine Pier, for her research assistance and help in compiling the index.

This book would not have been written without the love and support of my family, especially my parents, Bill and Suzanne, who have encouraged and inspired me by their example from day one. I thank Julia for being a wonderful sister, as well as Rose and David for providing help and cheer when it was most needed. I also want to express gratitude to my friends, whose company buoyed me through this book's completion, especially Pav Aulakh, Alex Dubilet, Jen Fay, Brendan Fernandes, Marlon Fisher, Jessie Hock, Donny Hodge, Scott Juengel, Tom Krell, Shauna Kushner, Josh Pineda, Lauchie Reid, Sean Roman, and several others whose names are already mentioned above.

The gratitude most difficult to express here is due to my partner, Karen Ng, and our son, Theo, whose love and companionship underlie every page of this book. Karen remains my favorite philosopher, my best critic, and my best friend. Theo spoke his first words as this book was being completed and his continually expanding powers of articulacy astonish me every day. This book is dedicated to them, with love.

In a transitional age, when many qualities are changing their value, new words, to express new values, are much to be desired.

~Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1966: 176)

Moral tasks are characteristically endless not only because 'within', as it were, a given concept our efforts are imperfect, but also because as we move and as we look our concepts themselves are changing.

~Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection" (1971: 27)

Introduction

Moral language is constantly changing. In the twentieth century alone, a striking list of new moral terms entered mainstream discourse. The English word "racism," following the slightly earlier appearance of "*racisme*" in French, emerged around the turn of the century. Yet it was only in the 1930s that it came into widespread use as a pejorative, primarily to condemn anti-Semitism in Europe. The term "genocide" did not exist until 1942, when it was coined by Raphäel Lemkin, a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent who fled Nazi occupation. He was motivated by the conviction that existing terms, like "mass murder," "atrocity," and "war crimes" failed to capture distinctive aspects of the horrors of the Armenian Genocide and the Nazi Holocaust. "Sexism" was not coined until the 1960s, overtaking the popularity of earlier phrases like "male chauvinism" and "male supremacy." Its coiners—Pauline M. Leet in a 1965 speech at Franklin and Marshall College and, in print, Caroline Bird in a 1968 essay—both introduced the neologism by way of analogy with the existing term, "racism." Bird's editors initially objected because they could not find the word in the dictionary. The invention of the term "sexual harassment" would have to wait another full decade. Its coinage in the mid-seventies is usually attributed to a consciousness raising group in Ithaca, New York, and, according to some sources, was first used on a placard at a political demonstration. "Hate speech" is younger still, first introduced by legal scholars only in the late 1980s. To this list we could add many others, including "child abuse," "domestic violence," and "climate crisis."[1]

[1] On the history of the term, "racism," see Frederickson 2002. On Raphäel Lemkin and the coining of the term "genocide" see Hinton 2002; Korey 2001; Power 2013; and Irvin-Erickson

None of these terms were in wide circulation a century ago. Measured against the history of the human linguistic capacity, they are in their infancy. Yet our contemporary moral vocabularies would be unrecognizable without them.

The development of new moral terms points to a fundamental condition of our lives with language, namely, that to possess a language is to be continually invested in expanding its powers of articulacy. In the moral domain, this becomes vivid when we recognize that our descriptions of actions and events—like "sexual harassment" and "hate speech"—are not ready-mades standing by to be incorporated into maxims, but must be fashioned, developed, and refined by us. Yet what exactly are we doing when we bring ethically significant phenomena under new descriptions? Are we naming moral realities that already exist, fully formed and intact, prior to their expression in language? Or do ethical phenomena bear a more sensitive relation to the descriptions under which they fall, such that developments in moral language help constitute the objects they bring to light?

The project of this book is to identify a conceptually distinctive way in which language shapes morality, by arguing that a certain kind of exercise of our linguistic capacities simultaneously reveals and reshapes the objective layout of ethical life. I call this *moral*

2017. On "sexism," as well as many other linguistic innovations of women's social movements from the nineteenth century up to the 1980s, see Schapiro 1985. On "sexual harassment," see Brownmiller 1990: 279–94 and Freedman 2002: chap. 12. Brown 2017 cites Matsuda 1989 as the first use of the phrase "hate speech" in print. The term "child abuse" was introduced in 1961 in Denver, Colorado by C. Henry Kempe at a meeting of the American Academy of Pediatricians (Hacking 1999: 125). Modern use of the phrase "domestic violence" (along with related terms like "domestic abuse" and "intimate partner violence") arose in the seventies (Jackson 2007: xix; Javier and Herron 2018: xvii–xxi; Lockhart and Danis 2010). "Climate crisis" emerged in the 1980s and has been cited by defenders as an improvement over the earlier label, "global warming," for better encompassing the myriad persistent changes to the environment linked to a rise in the Earth's average temperature, adding the sense of emergency or tipping point connoted by "crisis." (Jaskulsky and Besel 2013).

articulation, the development of new moral concepts to express initially inchoate moral experiences, transforming one's latent sense of moral significance into a discursively articulable moral claim. I argue that moral articulation follows an expressive logic, according to which acts of expression help constitute the realm of value they simultaneously bring to light. On the one hand, the picture defended here is *realist*, holding that struggles to articulate new moral concepts like 'sexual harassment' and 'hate speech' are rationally answerable to real, value-laden moral phenomena that preexist their expression in language.[2] On the other hand, the picture is *historically dynamic*, holding that moral language is not merely a tool for expressing independent moral truths, but shapes and reshapes the moral phenomena it is brought in to express. The result is a historically sensitive yet objective picture of morals, which emphasizes the role of linguistic expression in developing the ethical form of life we share.[3]

The task will be to outline the stages of moral articulation from the inchoate experiences that serve as its impetus to the newly refined claim-making capacities that serve as its *telos*. To elaborate this process is to emphasize that the labor of bringing experiences

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[2] Generally, I use double quotation marks when referring to a word or linguistic phrase (e.g., the neologism, coined in 1942, "genocide") and single quotation marks when referring to concepts expressed by such words and phrases (e.g., historically developing and contested concepts of 'genocide'). This convention faces difficulties in some discussions, particularly where both a linguistic phrase and a concept are at stake simultaneously. In those cases, I rely upon signposts in the text to indicate what is at issue.

[3] While some moral philosophers employ a technical distinction between the *ethical* and the *moral*, I use them interchangeably throughout this book. Bernard Williams (1985: 6–11; chap. 10, *passim*), for example, works with an open-ended conception of the ethical that includes a broad range of considerations pertaining to the question, "How should one live?" He reserves the term "morality" for a modern offshoot of ethics that focuses more narrowly upon specialized notions of obligation and blame. While Williams' distinction is useful in the context of his critique of "the morality system," my own argument does not rely upon such a distinction. Hence, I use both terms in ways that correspond, roughly, with Williams' more capacious sense of the "ethical."

under new descriptions, of piecing together a coherent picture of just *what, exactly, has happened*, is an ethical task in its own right. This idea is often underplayed in contemporary moral theory, which focuses more attention on assessing situations whose descriptions are already given and analyzing moral judgments and concepts that have already been formed than the process of forming those descriptions, judgments, and concepts in the first place.[4] In a rush to answer questions of justification and legitimacy, to establish right procedures, ideal contracts, formal standards, rules, and action-guidance, moral theory tends to pass over a question that necessarily arrives a step before the task of justifying a moral judgment, namely, *through what process of articulation has a particular experience arisen to the level of expression such that it can be taken as an object of moral judgment at all*? Perhaps this tendency is underwritten by a supposed dichotomy between descriptive and evaluative discourse, which implies that simply to describe an experience or event is neither, as such, to evaluate it, nor to adopt a practical stance towards it, and thus not within the ambit of ethics proper.[5] Whatever the explanation, this book is motivated by the conviction that contemporary moral theory too often focuses its attention solely upon forms of ethical thought and meaning that have already assumed propositional or sentential shape, thus leaving unconsidered the activities of mind and socio-epistemic practice

[4] I substantiate this claim with examples in §§1.2 and 1.3 in Chapter 1, below.

[5] A dichotomy embraced as a methodological starting point by, for example, the classical emotivists, like A.J. Ayer (1952) and Charles Stevenson (1937). Views that endorse this dichotomy are alive today, for instance, in the ongoing debate over whether "thick" moral concepts, like *courage*, can be reductively analyzed as combining a "thin" evaluation, like *good*, plus some non-evaluative descriptive content (see, for example, Elstein and Hurka 2009), as well as in contemporary defenses of expressivism in metaethics, which requires "the disunity of evaluative and descriptive language" (Franzén 2020: 1097). For criticisms of the dichotomy, which provide inspiration in what follows, see Murdoch 1971 and 1992; Cavell 1971; and McDowell 1998.

through which such thoughts—along with the value-laden pictures of the world they express—are pieced together in the first place.

This book is a work in moral psychology, yet I wish to emphasize that this does not imply an individualistic approach, as if moral psychology were concerned solely with the intra-psychic dynamics of particular agents, ignoring the social and historical contexts within which they have their home. A number of social-philosophical concepts are central in what follows: notions of ideology, epistemic injustice, social critique, counterpublics, moral subcultures, and the trans-individualist idea of a life-form. Though moral articulation has important beginnings in individual experience, the process itself is irreducibly social, as any effort to express moral significance to others invokes the idea, if only in aspiration, of a community with whom that significance can be shared. This is similar to what Kant calls, in the aesthetic context, a *sensus communis*, the hopeful anticipation of communal meaning built into every evaluative judgment.[6] In some cases of moral articulation, and especially in the early stages, the community will be a narrowly defined "counterpublic," for example, the likeminded members of a feminist consciousness raising group, workers joined in solidarity by a labor struggle, or fellow organizers in an anti-racist social movement.[7] New moral concepts and claims often emerge within a moral avant-garde that may not initially reach—or even be concerned to reach—a broader audience. Yet in other contexts, and especially in the later stages of moral articulation, the community invoked may be open-ended. This happens when the members of a moral avant-garde bring their newly forged concepts and claims to a broader social sphere and

[6] See Kant 2000 (1790): Ak. 5:293–5. For an interpretation of Kant's *sensus communis* along these lines, see Cavell 1997.

[7] On the idea of a "counter-public," see Fraser 1990 and Haslanger 2017b: 11, Mills' notion of a "black alternative public sphere" (Mills 2017a), and my discussion of moral subcultures in Chapter 6 (§6.1, point [iii]), below.

proposes for them a *universal* status, as when consciousness raising groups first began to promote 'sexual harassment' as a concept that can and should be grasped by anyone, including those who had not directly experienced the form of violation it names; or when the term, "genocide," initially coined to articulate a specific set of moral horrors in the twentieth century, became a globally recognized name for a moral evil cutting across time and place, such that it could be used to name atrocities that occurred well before the invention of the term, as in the genocide of Indigenous populations under colonialism.[8] At its most open-ended, moral articulation aims to address all fellow members of one's *life-form*, a term of art with Aristotelian origins that I will discuss later (Chapter 5) but which for now may be understood roughly as an ethically-saturated counterpart to the biological concept of a *species*.[9] Given these preoccupations with the essential sociality, or trans-individuality, of moral thought and expression, it may be more accurate to classify this book as falling somewhere on the border between moral psychology and social philosophy.

The genealogical tradition stretching from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault offers a well-known philosophical precedent for the view that morality evolves historically. For many, the attraction of the genealogical method lies in its ability to demonstrate that values previously thought eternal, immutable, or true *a priori* are, in fact, historically contingent, thereby deflating moralizing fantasies of purity and self-certainty by revealing that seemingly

[8] Both of these examples receive extended discussions in the chapters that follow. On the case of the concept, 'sexual harassment', see §§1.5, 2.1, and 3.2; on the case of the concept 'genocide', see §6.2, thesis (iv). For historical references, see the notes in those sections and footnote 1, above.

[9] Chapter 5 develops this notion by drawing on the works of Philippa Foot (2001), Michael Thompson (2004, 2008) and Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), though the Marxian notion of *species-being* (*Gattungswesen*) is relevant here, as it provides a model for a historically dynamic yet objectively real constraint upon the possibilities for human flourishing and suffering (Marx 1988).

immaculate ideals can have dubious origins in power, violence, and the will to dominate.[10] A genealogical approach might appear particularly apt with respect to the concerns of the present book, not least of all because its proponents routinely give pride of place to language in tracing the genealogy of morals (see, especially, Nietzsche's emphasis on etymologies and the "lordly right of giving names" and Foucault's notion of "discursive formations").[11] Nevertheless, this method faces limits in light of our present aims, at least insofar the genealogy of morals has the ambition to explain morality "from the outside," so to speak, that is, to treat moral phenomena as explicable in non-moral terms. This will be the case, at least, if we consider versions of the genealogical approach that treat the struggles and acts of creativity that give birth to new values and new moral conceptions ultimately as expressions of power.[12] We need not deny that this is a helpful diagnosis in many cases, and with respect to Nietzsche's texts it is important to keep in mind that he restricted his genealogical critique to one very specific, albeit pervasive, modern paradigm of Judeo-Christian morality. Yet if we were to generalize

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[10] Or, perhaps, in sheer contingency. In this spirit, Foucault writes that a genealogy of values reveals "that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (Foucault 1984: 78).

[11] In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes, "The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers: they say 'this *is* this and this,' they seal every thing and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it" (Nietzsche 1989 [1887]: First Essay, §2). The notion of "discursive formations" is central in Foucault's the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002: see, esp. Chap. 2).

[12] Nietzsche's diagnosis of the "slave revolt in morality" exemplifies this thought: "The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values" (Nietzsche 1989 [1887]: First Essay, §10. Like Nietzsche, I think that emotional responses to wrongdoing can be creative of new values, and that resentment (though perhaps not the envy-infused form of vengeful anger Nietzsche called *ressentiment*) is one of the forms in which this can occur. Unlike Nietzsche, however, I am interested in the notion that value-creative resentments can be a rational and healthy response to wrongdoing and injustice (see Chapter 3, below).

this to the reductive thesis that all moral values and concepts are, at bottom, expressions of power and nothing more, we would embrace a view that obscures the possibility of judging whether some historically emergent value or concept can be credited as rational and objective or, by the same token, irrational and distorting. Given our present aims, we should be cautious about adopting an approach that, as a matter of sheer method, gives up on the very possibility of distinguishing between a new moral concept's being a mere expression of power and its being a rational effort to express something real.

Throughout the book I make use of a notion of *articulation* inspired by the work of Charles Taylor—an influence reflected in this book's title and central concept.[13] Articulation refers to an activity of conceptualization that strives to be faithful to an object that it simultaneously transforms. We may contrast *descriptions*, which predicate objects that are, so to speak, indifferent to the ways we speak about them (as when I say that "The Earth is round" or "has a surface area of 196.9 million miles") with *articulations*, which are directed at features of ourselves such as our desires, emotions, and inchoate senses of importance, which can grow and shift as we find new frames to think and speak about them.[14] These latter sorts of 'objects' are sensitive to the concepts and terms under which they fall, such that they become what they are, in part, through their conceptualization and expression in language. Compare a *description* of the sea as "tempestuous" with an *articulation* of one's own emotional state as "tempestuous."

[13] Taylor's discussions of articulation extend across many decades, spanning his writings on language, human agency, and mind, as well as his engagements with historical figures, particularly G.W.F. Hegel, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See, especially, Taylor 1985 (Essays 1, 2, 3, and 9); 1989 (esp., Part I); and, most recently, 2016. I also draw from Taylor's related notion of *reasoning through transitions* (see Taylor 1995) as part of my discussion of moral progress in Chapter 6, §6.2, below.

[14] This has resonances with Ian Hacking's distinction between "indifferent kinds" and "interactive kinds" (Hacking 1999: 106). I discuss the relation between articulation and Hacking's notion of discursive construction in Chapter 4, §4.2, below.

Our descriptions may alter our understanding of the sea, but not the sea itself. Yet a self-interpretation of one's own feelings through the metaphor of a violent, unpredictable storm may cast a new light on those very feelings, in ways that are apt to alter their felt quality and significance. Like descriptions, our articulations of what is important, valuable, and meaningful strive to be faithful to something real. There is the prospect of one's articulations ranging from the discerning to the deluded, as, perhaps, the tempest metaphor might fail to enunciate some nuance of one's emotional state. In this respect, our articulations are appropriate targets of epistemic criticism, for they can get things right or wrong. Yet the 'object' of articulation is not itself unchanged by our efforts to grasp and express it in language.[15] The feeling one interprets as "tempestuous" does not stand there, self-sufficient and wholly intact, like a planet waiting to be discovered, but becomes something new in light of its expression. Articulation follows what I shall refer to as an *expressive logic*: it alters the very object it brings to light.[16]

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[15] In this respect, my use of the term, "articulation," differs fundamentally from Eli Alshanetsky's use of the term in his recent book, *Articulating a Thought* (2019). Alshanetsky uses the term to refer to a particular kind of struggle to articulate what one is thinking, where the process of articulation preserves, rather than develops or transforms, one's original thought. The movement of "articulation" in Alshanetsky's sense is from implicit to explicit knowledge. By contrast, moral articulation is a movement in the direction of development, refinement, and maturation—all of which involves the idea that the results of articulation are not merely preservations, but transformations, of the feelings and thoughts that prompted it.

[16] Henry S. Richardson's insightful book, *Articulating the Moral Community* (2018) makes comparable use of the term "articulation" as part of an account of moral innovation, though not in reference to Taylor. Richardson foregrounds the productive ambiguity in the term, "articulation," which may refer both to the "metaphor of voice" and the "metaphor of flexible movement allowed by partial independence of internal parts" (Richardson 2018: 13). He also shares this book's aim of defending a picture of morality as simultaneously objective and subject to historical development. There are, moreover, details of his account that are consonant with the approach adopted here, for example, his insistence that we need not conceive of moral inquiry as aiming at some fixed or fated "endpoint" (39) and his concern to maintain a historical conception of morality without lapsing into a crude "decisionism" (160). However, our projects depart from one another in significant respects, which I note here briefly (some of which I elaborate in later chapters). (i) My emphasis on articulation is meant

My claim is that the historical development of new concepts and vocabularies to give expression to inchoate senses of ethical significance, as in the invention of terms like "sexual harassment" and "hate speech," follows, at least in many significant cases, the expressive logic of articulation rather than the straightforward logic of description. Moral articulations strive to express objective features of ethical life that preexist their expression in words, while simultaneously bringing about deep changes in ethical life's objective layout.[17] The philosophical interest of this claim, we shall see, lies in its challenging two assumptions that structure much of contemporary ethical theory. The first is a methodological approach in ethics that treats the discursively formulable judgment or proposition as the minimum unit of moral meaningfulness. The assumption that moral significance is, as I shall put it, *discursive all*

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to highlight the theme of the relation between moral phenomena and language, a theme that is not explored in its own terms in Richardson. (ii) Richardson's account of moral historical change is comparatively restrictive. He remains friendly to the idea that morality bears an "invariant core" (21) containing the "eternal grounds of morality" (187) while urging that human activity contributes to "filling in the gaps" of indeterminacy at that lie at its periphery. By contrast, the notion of moral historical change I defend in this book runs deeper, challenging the notion of that objective morality requires an ahistorical core (see, esp., Chapter 5, below). (iii) Richardson defends a picture of the universal scope of morality as extending to all *persons*, whereas I defend an Aristotelian account of universality rooted in a shared *life-form* (on the significance of this distinction, see §5.2, below). (iv) On his pragmatist account, moral progress is not a matter of "enhancing our grasp of the truth in any straightforward way" but of "reducing morality's indeterminacy" (153). By contrast, the form of realism I pursue here retains the notion of truth in ethics as central (see, e.g., §2.2, below).

[17] As a term of art, "ethical life" has Hegelian origins as the standard English translation of *Sittlichkeit* (see, e.g., Hegel 1977: §§443–82). Without wishing to overburden my occasional use of the term with exegetical concerns, I want from it the idea of a domain of rational requirements that is simultaneously natural and social, as well as both objective and historical. I also want to maintain a capacious notion of what is included in ethical life, understood as a broad domain of values, norms, social practices, and relations of recognition, which Hegel contrasts with a more narrowly circumscribed domain of "*Moralität*," focused solely on abstract imperatives and laws (though I do not systematically employ a corresponding distinction between "ethics" and "morality"; see note 3, above).

the way down, leaves out of consideration, as a matter of method, the idea that the activities of rational moral thought extend beyond such discursively explicit moves as endorsing, rejecting, and inferentially relating moral judgments, and includes the prior activity of piecing together, from the fragments of inchoate experience, a discursively articulable picture of the world in the first place. The first half of this book (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) is directed primarily at criticizing the exhaustively discursive picture and advocating a broader view of moral meaning and rationality. The second is the assumption, at work in both defenses and critiques of objectivity in ethics, that, if objective moral grounds exist, they must be (traceable back to grounds that are) immutable. Against this idea, which I shall call the *immutability thesis*, this book explores the viability of a historicized variation of moral realism that can accommodate the idea of moral grounds that are simultaneously rationally objective and historical in a deep sense.[18] The view I defend is *historicist* in a twofold sense: (i) as a thesis about moral epistemology, it holds, roughly, that our apprehension of moral truth is invariably mediated by our historically and culturally concrete situations and, (ii) as a thesis about moral ontology, it holds, roughly, that moral values themselves are the results of historical development and

[18] Attempts to combine realism and historicism in ethics, though heterodox, have some precedent. Hegel and Marx, for example, have both been described as "historicized realists" about ethical value (Wood 1990: 33–5). MacIntyre (2008), Taylor (1989), Lovibond (2002), and Honneth (2002) defend similar views, from a combination of Aristotelian, Hegelian, and Wittgensteinian perspectives. From a pragmatist perspective, Kitcher (2011) argues that a story about the Darwinian evolution of ethics over tens of thousands of years is consistent with notions of ethical truth and ethical knowledge; and Richardson (2018) argues that objective morality can change over time as a result of our constructive efforts to address morally indeterminate situations (though see footnote 16, above, for a comparison between Richardson's approach and my own). Raz (2003) defends a historicized, practice-based account of value, focusing primarily on aesthetic values. The question of the historicity of objective moral value is distinct from questions concerning how conventional moral practices and beliefs undergo historical development. For discussions of the latter, see, for example, Appiah 2010 and Bicchieri 2017.

subject to ongoing alteration, albeit within certain bounds. Though this concern with historicism runs throughout the book, it receives special attention in the latter half (Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

Moral articulation begins with an experience of the failure of our received discursive repertoires in the face of an experience we nevertheless apprehend as meaningful. Chapter 1 explores examples of, as I shall put it, *discursive breakdown*, finding that, far from being a mere cognitive and linguistic dysfunction, the experience that one cannot satisfactorily encompass something in language and thought can be the mark of a rational confrontation with that very feature. Though such experiences resist expression in discursive terms, they nevertheless bear organization and form, a point I elaborate by defending a notion of *proto-discursive meaning*. As the central sections of this chapter are devoted to substantiating, a prominent, if often tacit, conception of meaning in contemporary philosophical thought rules out as incoherent the very idea of proto-discursivity. This is the idea that the minimum unit of meaningfulness is the *proposition* or the discursively formulable *judgment*, an idea that, we shall find, also structures much of contemporary ethical theory. After casting doubt on the idea that the proposition or discursively articulable evaluative judgment should serve as our sole model for moral meaningfulness, the remainder of the chapter asks whether the *expressive logic of articulation* might provide a suitable alternative.

Chapter 2 turns to some social epistemological issues raised by the claims of the preceding chapter, specifically the idea that moments of discursive breakdown can bear rational and cognitive content despite their simultaneously standing as dissonant frustrations of the discursive intellect. I argue that a *conceptualist* picture of moral experience is key here, according to which even low-level perceptions, memories, and modes of practical response are thoroughly mediated by concepts. This means that the articulation of new moral concepts

in the face of initially inchoate and elusive experiences never begins from a bare, nonconceptual "given," but always works from within a culturally and historically specific conceptual inheritance. I make two broad points in this chapter that are intended to clarify the form of conceptualism I defend. First, I offer a flexible account of conceptuality according to which an experience may qualify as conceptually mediated without the experiencer being in a position, even upon reflection, to make that experience discursively explicit. Second, I argue that the thoroughgoing conceptual mediation of experience is not only compatible with, but required by, the idea that moral thought is responsive to objective features of the world. I approach this question, in part, by raising the issue of *ideology*, understood in the pejorative sense as the conceptual dimension of injustice and oppression. The result of my discussion is an ambivalent depiction of our condition as moral articulators: the fact that we always encounter the world from within a historically and culturally concrete conceptual inheritance makes us permanently susceptible to ideology, systemic ignorance, and stubborn recalcitrance to moral change. Yet it simultaneously provides rational resources that make counter-ideological acts of moral articulation possible.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the cognitive role that emotions can play in the process of moral articulation. This allows me to draw out some moral psychological consequences of the view developed in the preceding chapters. I focus specifically on the case of *resentment*, understood as a paradigmatic moral emotional response to perceived wrongdoing or injustice. I find in philosophical discussions of resentment, from early modernity to the present, two claims that can appear to be in tension with one another: first, that resentments are grounded in the resenter's received normative outlook as it stands and, second, that resentments can play a creative role, not only shoring up one's received normative expectations, but creating new ones. I show that, with the help of the expressive logic of articulation, we can

accommodate the intuitions that drive both theses within a unified account of resentment and suggest that this can form the basis for a more general view, which I call the *articulation model of emotion*. Though this falls within the family of so-called "cognitive-evaluative" theories of emotion, I show how adopting this model requires revisions to dominant versions of this approach, exemplified by Martha Nussbaum's work on emotion. Exploring the specific case of resentment allows us to offer a case study of the emotional dimensions of moral articulation, demonstrating emotions' simultaneously cognitive and transformative potential.

While the first half of the book (Chapters 1–3) focuses primarily upon the transformative effects moral articulation has at the moral psychological and socio-epistemic levels, the latter half (Chapters 4–6) turns its attention to the level of moral ontology, asking whether moral articulation's effects extend, not only to our *conceptions* of moral value, but to values themselves. I begin this inquiry in Chapter 4 by taking up the notion of *discursive construction* as used by social philosophers like Ian Hacking and Sally Haslanger. I suggest that a distinction between *merely causal* and *rational* forms of discursive construction helps us see how moral facts might be discursively constructed while nevertheless maintaining their objectively rational credentials, in ways that allow them to underwrite ethically-oriented social criticism. As part of this chapter's discussion, I elaborate two features of moral articulation that become particularly important for the arguments of the chapters that follow: moral articulation is purposively oriented towards the dual aims of *illumination* and *maturation*. This adds a crucial element to my earlier characterization of the expressive logic of articulation: moral articulation transforms shared ethical life not in just any direction whatsoever, but in ways for which metaphors of *growth* and *maturation* are apt.

Chapter 5 continues this argument by proposing that a historicized variation of Aristotelian ethical naturalism, of the sort defended by Philippa Foot, provides the right ethical

framework within which to pursue a picture of morals as simultaneously historical and objective. Here I make explicit and discuss the seeming philosophical attraction of the *immutability thesis*, which holds that the very idea of objective moral grounds requires the idea of grounds that transcends history. After considering a powerful argument in favor of the immutability thesis from Kant, the rest of the chapter is devoted to showing that an Aristotelian picture of ethical objectivity is conceptually innocent of this assumption and can get along well without it. Here I show how a deep form of historicism is already implicit in existing defenses of ethical naturalism. Yet I also attempt to push the historicizing elements of this picture further, by arguing that we may think about our historically evolving linguistic efforts to express the conditions of human flourishing as *articulating*, rather than merely *describing*, those conditions.

Throughout this book, the theme of *moral progress* looms, albeit often only in the background. Chapter 6 makes this theme explicit, assembling the materials from the previous chapters in order to provide an account of the moral epistemology of judgments of moral progress that has emerged. Moral articulation seems to implicate itself in a circle: it is a process that helps create and reshape the very conceptual resources that will be used to assess its own successes and failures. My conviction is that this circularity ought to be embraced as endemic to our condition as moral agents, rather than as a philosophical problem to be overcome. As such, my efforts in this final chapter are to show how the preceding chapters allow us to see our morally articulated, historically and culturally concrete outlooks as already containing the rational resources we need to make judgments of moral progress. The point, then, is not to escape the circle but to show how it can take a non-vicious form. In doing so, I embrace a conception of judging moral progress that follows a model of *immanent critique*.

I draw inspiration from many historical and contemporary authors in the pages that follow. Although my aims are not primarily exegetical, one might see in the following chapters the outlines of a loose-knit philosophical tradition that embraces a historical yet objective picture of morals. This includes several interwoven lines of inheritance. There is, first, a recurring Hegelian influence in the theme of a historical picture of ethical life and the immanent form of critique this picture demands. There is also a recurring conviction, inspired by Wittgenstein, that language is not merely a tool for communicating ideas or labeling objects but plays a constitutive role in shaping our forms of life. We shall also see a recurring effort to retain a roughly Aristotelian picture of the objectivity of ethical demands while giving it a historicist turn. To these we may add the work of critical social philosophers coming from feminist, anti-racist, and Marxian perspectives who have emphasized the role of creating new words, concepts, and narratives as central to ethical and political struggle.[19] My point in bringing these strands together is neither to impose upon them a common doctrine of "moral articulation" nor to elide their important differences. It is, rather, to suggest that we may find subtle historical threads woven together into a quiet tradition that views ethics as at once deeply historical and objective, while placing ongoing struggles of expression at the heart of shared ethical life.

The main aim of this book is to explore the idea that the creation of new moral concepts and languages contributes to the historical development of morality itself. To my

[19] A non-exhaustive list of figures who synthesize two or more of the overlapping lines of inheritance just mentioned, and who have influenced the historicized moral realism defended here, includes Iris Murdoch (1971, 1992, 1997), Charles Taylor (1985, 2016), Bernard Williams (1985), Sabina Lovibond (2002), Alasdair MacIntyre (1977, 2008), John McDowell (1996, 1998), Allen Wood (1990), Axel Honneth (1995), Rahel Jaeggi (2009, 2018), Linda Martín Alcoff (2007, 2018), Miranda Fricker (2007), Robert Gooding-Williams (2021, forthcoming), Alice Crary (2007, 2016), and Charles Mills (1997, 2007).

mind, there is much to be gained by embracing a thoroughly historicized conception of objective morality, in no small part because it frees us from a challenge that has shaped much of modern moral philosophy, namely, identifying and proving the validity of a principle, value, or moral law that is trans-historically intelligible and authoritative, independently of its historically concrete contexts of application.[20] The thought that we might locate the rational grounds of ethical criticism within our culturally and historically specific forms of life, rather than from a standpoint that leaves them behind, is part of what motivates my investigation into the historical dynamics of moral articulation. Admittedly, moral articulation is just one avenue into the question of the historicity of morals, and it would be reductive to say that language is the sole driving force in transforming the objective layout of ethical life. Since, according to the Aristotelian tradition I ally myself with here, the rationality of moral thought is grounded in the sorts of living creatures we are, a full account of the historicity of morals would require not only a discussion of language but a much broader range of material conditions that can alter the shape of our life-form. Yet if it is right to think that language and expressivity are not merely contingent features of our life-form but essential to who we are, exploring the historical dynamics of moral articulation will be a good place to start. For the capacity to articulate what is meaningful is not just one capacity among others but pervades and transforms everything else that belongs to a human life.[21]

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[20] I discuss examples of this tendency in modern moral philosophy in Chapter 5, §5.1, below.

[21] This last point resonates with the idea, defended by Boyle (2016) and McDowell (1996: Lecture VI) that a creature's capacity for discursive rationality is not merely "additive" with respect to its other animal capacities, but "transformative."

1. Changing Our Concepts

> Why can't I ever say what I really mean?
>
> ~ Johnny Utah in *Point Break* (dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1991)

Let us begin very generally, with an experience familiar to any language-user: the experience of one's words failing to articulate what one wants to express. You are struck by a work of art and want to share your sense of its beauty with a friend. You say something about its "balance" and "harmony," but the words are too generic to convey the complexity of your response. In another situation, you decide to declare the depths of your love to your beloved. You are embarrassed when the speech you hoped would capture the singularity of your relationship tumbles out in a string of clichés. In a third situation, an interaction with your boss leaves you feeling angry, yet you cannot say why. Your latent sense of violation is met with confusion as you try to voice it to a co-worker. Such experiences can leave us feeling that the meaningfulness of the world outstrips what we can presently put into phrases. Suppose we take this to be a basic condition of our lives with language. What follows? What is the relationship between meaningful experience and language such that the former can overflow the latter?

Moral articulation begins with an experience of the limits of language, the sense that one's received discursive repertoires fail to make sense of some feature of ethical life. Elaborating the experience of *discursive breakdown*, as I shall name it, provides a good starting point for our discussion. For not only is discursive breakdown the first stage of moral articulation, but exploring its phenomenology and structure offers an entry point into the more fundamental questions raised in the Introduction concerning the relation between language and ethical life. I shall begin by characterizing

the contents of such experiences as *proto-discursive* (§1.1) before sketching a tendency in philosophical theories of meaning in general (§1.2) and in ethics in particular (§1.3) that makes the ideas of discursive breakdown and proto-discursivity difficult to see. Setting the stage in this way will allow me to give a preliminary overview of the view of conceptual change on offer in this book (§§1.4 and 1.5).

1.1. Discursive Breakdown

The first thing to note is that such experiences, despite their resistance to discursive expression, nevertheless bear some degree of organization and form. There is in each case an intentional object of awareness—*this* work of art, *this* relationship, *this* social interaction with your boss—that has been carved out of the sensible manifold as a distinct phenomenon inviting expression, even if accompanied by a sense of elusiveness. This point is basic: a minimum degree of organization and form is necessary for any experience whatsoever, for an experience of pure formlessness or total disorder would be no experience at all. This organization and form, moreover, cannot be something we receive from the world purely passively, but must already involve the contributions of our own activity of organizing and forming a meaningful picture of the world. For when something in experience presents itself as meaningful—as beautiful, as beloved, as morally injurious—it offers itself as an opportunity to respond, inviting judgment and practical response without automatically determining what exactly that judgment or response must be. There is, in other words, space for freedom in one's receptivity to the meaningfulness of things, whether in the play of imagination that attends contemplation of an artwork, the spontaneity of an expression of love, or the creativity required in formulating a moral protest.[22] In

[22] The idea that a combination of spontaneity and receptivity go into the realization of any potential experience of meaningfulness traces back to Kant. For a canonical statement, see the *Critique of Pure Reason* (2007: A51/B75). My way of putting the point here is indebted to John McDowell's elaboration of the point in *Mind and World* (1996) and elsewhere (see, esp. 2009: Essays 1, 2, 3, 5, and 14). This is

this respect, receptivity to meaning cannot be a purely passive affair, but involves the mediating work of our own agency. I shall express this combination of ideas—(i) that such experiences bear at least a minimum degree of organization and form and (ii) that this organization and form is at least partially attributable to agents' activities of organizing and forming pictures of the world—by saying that such
-> experiences are, despite their resistance to discursive expression, always *conceptually mediated*.[23]

Next we may note that experiences of discursive breakdown are accompanied by a latent sense that the elusive object contains depths of meaning not fully fathomable by one's existing discursive powers. It is not simply that something's meaning eludes one, but that one perceives something's meaning *as* elusive. There is an important difference between, for example, (a) the boss insulting you without your recognizing any insult at all (and so the meaning of the act *simply eludes* you); and (b) your harboring a cloudy sense that the boss has done something insulting that you cannot quite pin down (and so you experience the meaning of the act *as elusive*). Notice that (b) involves a form of self-consciousness or reflexivity absent in (a), for the relevant quality of *elusiveness* functions as what we might call a *self-conscious predicate*. While non-self-conscious predicates are ascribed directly to objects, self-conscious predicates make explicit features of one's subjectively mediated relation to those objects

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closely related to a recurring theme in Iris Murdoch, namely, the idea that moral experience involves a combination of creative conceptualization and exposure to a reality that transcends us (see, e.g., 1997: 95).

[23] This notion of conceptual mediation receives extended discussion in Chapter 2, though it may be helpful to anticipate two points I defend there. First, this notion of conceptuality is emphatically social. By the time one experiences the artwork, the beloved, or the social interaction as meaningfully engaging one's agency, an entire history of development, education, socialization, and conversation with others will already have been at work behind the scenes, forming and organizing the frame within which experiences like this can occur at all. Second, this use of "conceptual" is heterodox insofar as it leaves space for the possibility of experiences that are conceptual yet not discursive. *Discursive* here refers to the form some bit of meaning must take into order to be expressible in language (even if it is not actually so expressed). *Conceptual* here refers to the minimum unity and form an experience must have in order to strike consciousness as bearing any organization and form at all. As I argue below, such unity and organization need not take discursive form (see, esp., Chapter 2, §2.1).

(compare "The cardinal *is red*" with "The cardinal *is blurry from this distance*"). Thus, to experience some phenomenon as eluding one's discursive grasp means that one's consciousness has shifted its focus from an initial intentional object (the social interaction with one's boss) to the quality of one's conscious relation to that object (in this case, the inadequacy of one's modes of discursive apprehension with respect to that social interaction). One is thrown back upon oneself, catching a glimpse of one's own discursive powers as having broken down, as needing to change or grow if the elusive object is to be more satisfactorily understood and communicated to others.

That instances of discursive breakdown involve a moment of heightened reflexivity invites a conclusion that can initially appear paradoxical: under certain circumstances, the feeling of being thrown from one's capacity to grasp a feature of reality in language and discursive thought can be credited as a rational confrontation with that feature, insofar as the experience reveals something true about the limits of one's existing discursive powers.[24] By hypothesis, the person in case (b) is sensitive to something important that the person in case (a) has missed, despite the fact that it is the person in (a) and not (b) who experiences their discursive powers as functioning smoothly. The upshot is this:

[24] This is a recurring theme in Murdoch's ethical writings, where a person's openness to discursive breakdown is portrayed as essential to the ongoing process of moral growth. In an early essay, "Thinking and Language," Murdoch writes that "Language and thought are not co-extensive. That this is so is obvious if we consider the experience of attempting to break through a linguistic formulation grasped as inadequate in relation to an obscurely apprehended content" (1997: 35). Her claim comes as part of an attack on the view that mental activity loses its title to genuine cognition when it cannot be readily reconstructed in clear propositional form. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a related claim in his discussion of "epistemological crises": "The agent who is plunged into an epistemological crisis knows something very important: that a schema of interpretation which he has trusted so far has broken down irremediably in certain highly specific ways" (1977: 458). That certain experiences of breakdown or felt dissonance can be, for appropriately positioned agents, epistemically beneficial is also a recurring theme in various strands of feminist epistemology (see, e.g., Jaggar 1989; Fricker 2007: 40–1, 166–8; Medina 2013) as well as recent social-epistemological readings of Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness" (see, e.g., Mills 2007: 15). I discuss this notion of dissonance at more length in Chapter 2 (§2.3).

rather than being a mere cognitive dysfunction, experiences of discursive breakdown can provide the spark for discursive growth, precisely because they involve a shift into a higher reflexive gear. Prompted by such experiences, one might set out to learn, for instance, to speak about art more eloquently, find new and poetic ways to express one's love, or create new moral concepts that transform inarticulate suffering into articulate protest.[25] We could formulate this by saying that such experiences are, while not yet discursive, *proto-discursive*, striking one as bearing significant organization and form, yet in a manner that stands in tension with the discursive frameworks one habitually turns to in order to make sense of things.

! Finally, we may note a third point about such cases, namely, that their phenomenology involves a distinctive sort of *dissatisfaction* or *felt dissonance* that calls for transformation. We may therefore contrast them with cases that, though they represent limits to one's discursive capacities, are not experienced as dissonant in the relevant sense. Many experiences are difficult to put into words yet involve no dissatisfaction with one's present discursive repertoire, for one feels that the phenomenon is known or grasped well enough anyway. Borrowing a pair of examples from Iris Murdoch: the smell of the Paris Metro or what it is like to hold a mouse in one's hand may strike someone as difficult to describe without repeating the words already involved (Murdoch 1997: 46). In a similar spirit, Ludwig Wittgenstein offers "what a clarinet sounds like" as an example of something one might know without being about to say what one knows (2009: §78). These are cases in which something strikes one as meaningful, knowable, or cognizable in ways that outstrip one's powers of discursive expression. Yet they do not include the relevant sort of dissatisfaction or dissonance: one's frustrated feeling that one has failed to articulate something important that strikes us as demanding

[25] We should be careful not to ascribe any necessity to such positive developments. Experiences of discursive breakdown may equally lead to defensiveness, repression, retreat, complacency, and other forms of avoidance. Yet if we lacked experiences of discursive breakdown altogether, we would lose a powerful catalyst for expanding our powers of articulacy.

expression, whether the beauty of the artwork, the singularity of one's love, or the wrongness of the boss' behavior. The proto-discursive meanings at work in experiences of discursive breakdown are accompanied by an uncomfortable sense that one's discursive repertoires chafe against one's experience, actively working to suppress the experience's nascent meaning. Under the right conditions, this dissonance can be sharpened into a conviction that the failure in question must be overcome by revising or expanding one's discursive means.

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1.2. Meaning and Discourse

There is a widely held conception of meaning that makes the idea of proto-discursive experience look confused, even self-contradictory. I want to consider and criticize this theory at a general level before returning (in §1.3) to the question of how it constrains our thinking about the possibilities for *moral* meaningfulness in particular. I have in mind the view that the minimum unit of meaningful awareness is the *proposition*, an assertible, endorsable, inference-ready bit of content that can be made explicit in language.[26] I shall refer to such views as *discursive theories of meaning*.

This conception of meaning has been defended in a number of ways—most systematically as part of Robert Brandom's "inferential semantics" (1994; 2000)—but the general features of the view

[26] This view is sometimes attributed to Kant, Frege, and Wittgenstein, among others. Kant expresses a version of this principle in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he rejects the notion that concepts have any use for discursive creatures like us other than judgment-formation: "the only use which the understanding can make of concepts is to form judgments by them" (Kant 2007: A68/B93). In Frege, the source usually cited to support this reading is the so-called "context principle" in his *Foundations of Arithmetic*: "never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition" (Frege 1980: x). Wittgenstein echoes this principle in the *Tractatus*: "Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning" (Wittgenstein 2001: §3.3). For more recent discussions of this view, see Sellars (1997), McDowell (1996, 2009), and Brandom (1994, 2000, 2009).

are tacitly held by many and include the following sorts of ideas. To attribute meaning to *x* (an experience, feeling, thought, or anything else we might take as meaningful) is to ascribe to *x* a rational role within discursive practices of asserting, inferring, justifying, questioning, and related activities. So, in attributing meaning to my experience of the cardinal as red, I ascribe to my experience a discursive role: it underwrites assertions ("The cardinal is red"), exclusions ("The cardinal is colorless"), and material inferences ("The cardinal is the same color as the ladybug"). We cannot attribute significance of this sort to an experience, feeling, or thought unless it already bears the logical form of a judgment, a form that is in principle expressible in discourse. Another way to put this is through a notion of *publicity*. Meaning is essentially public. Its publicity consists paradigmatically in its communicability in language person-to-person, or more broadly in its use in social practices of asserting, criticizing, and justifying what one says. If the meaning of an experience coincides with (or consists in) its shareability and use within social discursive practices, then the idea of *meaningful yet non-discursive experience* can be attacked on two grounds, one ontological and one pragmatic: such experiences (i) do not exist and (ii) even if they did, they would be of no use, for there is nothing we could *do* with such an experience in social discursive practice. This means that any significant bit of thought-about content, whether explicitly voiced or tacitly contemplated, must already bear the sort of logical form that renders it susceptible to communication in discursive terms. Hence, *meaning is discursive all the way down.*

This is true (this line of thought continues) of even the most basic perceptual episodes, at least insofar as they can be credited as meaningful. For in purporting to reveal something about how things are, a perceptual episode, though not itself a literal claim, already has the *shape* of a claim, appearing to 'say' something like, "This is how things stand."[27] An experience lacking this claim-shaped (hence,

[27] This is the phrase Wittgenstein identifies as the general form of a proposition in the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 2001: §4.5). The theory under review in this section holds that this is also the general form of a meaningful experience. In this spirit, Wilfrid Sellars defends a view of perceptual episodes

discursive) form could not provide the experiencing agent with a basis for asserting anything about the world one way or the other. Indeed, we should be skeptical about whether anything meaningful could be said about a non-claim-shaped and thus non-assertible bit of content. For if one could say what that meaning was, it would thereby be revealed as, precisely, assertible. Brandom, speaking on behalf of Kant, says, "the fundamental unit of awareness or cognition, the minimum graspable, is the *judgment*" (Brandom 1994: 79), and elaborates the notion of judgment in terms of *propositional content*: "all our cognitive activity consists of judgment and aspects of that activity. Any content that can be discerned in any category is derivative from the content of possible judgments, that is, from propositional content" (Brandom 2000: 80; cf. 160). For concept-mongering creatures like us, there is no 'raw', un-interpreted, pre-discursive consciousness. The attempt to "break out of discourse to an *arché* beyond discourse" (Sellars 1997: §63) is motivated by a philosophically hopeless Myth of the Given. If the claim-shaped character of experience is understood in terms of its bearing propositional content, and if all propositional content is wholly discursive (meaning that it is already fit for expression in discourse without remainder), then this conception of meaning rules out *a priori* the idea of proto-discursive experience. Brandom's phrase for this view is the *priority of the propositional* (Brandom 2000: 13; 1994: 79–85; and 2009: chap. 1), though I shall focus on the more general view that *meaning is discursive all the way down*.

One who holds that meaning is discursive all the way down would have to account for cases of discursive breakdown without appealing to the notion of proto-discursive experience. For example, one could characterize discursive breakdown as a *contradiction* between (i) the discursive content of an experience and (ii) the discursive forms imposed upon that experience by existing conventional discursive frameworks. Sometimes this kind of explanation might work. For it may be that some cases

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as already making or containing "claims" in his famous essay, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1997: §16). For a discussion, see McDowell 2009: Essay 5.

of discursive breakdown are adequately explained in wholly discursive terms as a contradiction between one's already discursively articulable experience and the discursive repertoire one brings to bear upon that experience. An example would be an instance in which one has a discursively articulated apprehension of an experience of moral injury yet is forced to speak within a language-game that does not allow one to do justice to that apprehension—say, a plaintiff forced to articulate an experience of assault within a legal vocabulary that fails to capture its wrongness. A kind of discursive breakdown takes place here: there is a dissonance between what one wants to articulate and the discursive means one is—we may imagine in this example—pressured by the weight of social convention to employ.[28] Yet here we have a case that is the result of a conflict between competing discursively articulated contents, rather than a tension between a proto-discursive experience and one's received repertoires of discursive expression.

What discursive theories of meaning have difficulty explaining, however, and what I am urging is better explained by a theory allowing for proto-discursive experience, is discursive breakdown that results not from *contradiction* but from a phenomenon's *elusiveness*. Recall the distinction between (a) the meaning of an event simply eluding one and (b) one's experiencing the meaning of an event as elusive. Discursive theories introduce a gap between the discursive and the non-discursive according to which events are either discursively articulable or not registered by consciousness as meaningful at all. Events either simply elude us or else bear a determinate, propositionally articulable meaning with no middle ground. There is no room for the possibility of (b).

Of course, phrases like "*X* is elusive" are discursive. We may even become quite discursively articulate about experiences of the elusive, as sometimes occurs in poetry and literature.[29] Yet to think

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[28] This is a recurring theme in feminist work on the socially-imposed obstacles to testimony of sexual assault. See, e.g., Brison 2013 and Alcoff 2018.

[29] Consider, for example, the following passage from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*:

this speaks in favor of the wholly discursive view misses the point. All it reveals is that we are capable of using language to gesture towards language's limits, that we are capable of the higher-order reflexive act of discursively articulating that we have confronted a bit of meaning we are presently incapable of discursively articulating. If this is right, then we ought to leave space not only for cases of *contradiction-based discursive breakdown*, but also *elusion-based discursive breakdown*. The cases with which §1.1 began seem more naturally to fit the latter, elusion-based model: the aesthetic significance of the artwork, the singularity of one's love, one's dissonant sense of anger at one's boss. These are unlike the case of the plaintiff forced to speak within a legal vocabulary they already know is inferior to another existing vocabulary, for the former are all cases in which *it is not yet clear to the speaker what might constitute the relevant improvement to their discursive repertoire*. The needed discursive transformation is not that of a transition between two language-games one already knows, but of coming to inhabit (perhaps even create) a new language-game for the first time. In such cases all one has to go by is a tempting yet by itself unsatisfying intimation that something meaningful is there to be explored, combined with a sense

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> Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it until—you know the little tug—the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked; the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating. . . . But however small it was, it had, nevertheless, the mysterious property of its kind—put back into the mind, it became at once very exciting, and important; and as it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither, set up such a wash and tumult of ideas that it was impossible to sit still. (1957: 5–6)

Woolf's narrator has an intimation of *something* worth expressing while simultaneously realizing that she is not in a position to say satisfactorily, either to herself or others, just what that *something* is. Proto-discursive experiences, in the sense I am developing here, share the "mysterious property" Woolf describes in this passage: an intimation of something that, though we cannot say in advance what it is, nevertheless invites our curiosity and engagement.

of its dissonant relation to the discursive repertoires one presently inhabits. If this is right, and if such cases exist, then we seem to require the notions of *elusiveness* and *proto-discursive experience* I have been outlining here. This means rejecting the view that meaning is discursive all the way down.

1.3. The Discursive Theory of Meaning as a Questionable Supposition of Much Contemporary Ethical Theory

How does this bear on ethics? My contention is that we need a moral philosophy that can accommodate this experience of discursive breakdown if we are to understand how a certain fundamental sort of *moral conceptual development* is possible—one exemplified by the historical development of new moral concepts like 'genocide', 'racism', 'sexual harassment', 'hate speech' and the others mentioned at the beginning of the Introduction. Moral concepts are not timeless givens but historical results, and the experience that something morally important eludes our inherited conceptual schemes provides an important initial spark for the critical assessment and historical alteration of those schemes. Rephrased in the terminology I wish to adopt here, *elusion-based discursive breakdown* is, in many cases at least, an important early stage in the process of *moral articulation*.[30] If this is right, then a theory of meaning as discursive all the way down unduly obscures a crucial role that discursive breakdown can play in processes of moral conceptual development.[31] A survey of representative trends in

[30] A point I elaborate and defend further in Chapter 2 (see, esp., §2.1).

[31] Someone committed to the discursive theory could defend a certain picture of moral conceptual maturation rooted in discursive breakdown, but only in its *contradiction-based* form. One could, for example, develop a roughly Hegelian picture of "determinate negation" that involves moving from a contradiction between the discursive commitments within a closed-system of discursive rationality to the higher-order resolution of those commitments through a critical transformation of the system itself. Although this might be an appropriate characterization of moral conceptual growth in some cases, my view is that it would too quickly rule out, as a matter of methodological fiat, the possibility of cases of maturation prompted by intimations of elusive meanings.

contemporary ethical theory reveals that a (usually tacit) commitment to the discursive theory of meaning is presupposed in discussions of moral language, moral concepts, and—more broadly—the morally meaningful. My task in this section is to substantiate this exegetical claim with some examples. The view I go on to sketch in §§1.4 and 1.5—and then defend over the course of the rest of the book—draws its philosophical interest, in significant part, from the fact that it rejects this widely assumed picture of moral meaning.

To begin with, we find widespread—albeit usually implicit—commitment to this conception of moral meaning in metaethical debates. It would not be difficult to construct a fairly comprehensive narrative of metaethics over the past century that took as its central theme the problem of how to respond to the apparent fact that the surface grammar of moral discourse is that of a descriptive, property-attributing language.[32] Whether or not G.E. Moore himself would have approved, the analysis of 'good' offered in *Principia Ethica* (1903) inaugurated over a century's worth of attempts to formulate and solve philosophical puzzles concerning the meaning and truth-conditions of sentences that make use of explicitly normative words—'good' being paradigmatic, along with others like 'right', 'wrong', 'permissible', 'ought' and so on. By mid-century, one of the dominant approaches (in Anglophone philosophy, at least) held that, as R.M. Hare succinctly put it, ethics is ultimately "the logical study of the language of morals" (Hare 1952: iii). Thus, as a sheer matter of method, the only forms of moral meaning appropriate for moral philosophy to investigate were those expressed by a special class of sentences. It is not so much that philosophical arguments were made *against* the notion of proto-discursive or pre-linguistic forms of moral meaning, as it was that they were simply left out of consideration before the moral philosophy proper even got started.[33]

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[32] For an account of post-Moorean twentieth century metaethics that takes this theme as central, see Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton 1997.

[33] Of course, there are dissenters throughout this period, one of them being Murdoch (see, e.g., her early essay, "Thinking and Language," collected in Murdoch 1997). Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics"

Though today many moral philosophers would agree that the days of overly narrow linguistic analysis are over and that we are better off for it, the tendency to focus solely on discursive forms of moral meaning is no mere historical relic. Today, the most persistent debates in metaethics (whether moral discourse is cognitive or non-cognitive, whether it refers to natural or non-natural properties, whether the primary semantic role of moral discourse is descriptive, prescriptive, or otherwise) continue to concern problems that *only arise once moral thought takes (or purports to take) discursive shape*.[34] Particularly striking for present purposes is the nearly universal assumption that moral thought's claim to rationality stands or falls with the question of whether it can be understood as taking genuinely propositional or discursive form at all.[35] These trends are with us today in characterizations of moral

gives us a particularly striking image of the difficulty of reducing matters of value to propositional form: "I can only describe my feeling by the metaphor, that, if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world" (Wittgenstein 1993: 40).

[34] Once again, there are exceptions. A striking example is the debate, primarily within virtue theory, over whether the premises at work in a practical syllogism are necessarily "codifiable" (see, e.g., McDowell 1998: 27–9, 30, 34–5, and 65–9; Hursthouse 1999: 56–62; and Hursthouse 2011). As McDowell reads Aristotle, the premises that the virtuous person acts upon are not susceptible to definitive codification. They can, at best, be summed up as defeasible rules of thumb. See also Dancy (2004: chap. 10 and 11), who holds that knowledge of the practical purport of a concept involves a form of competent judgment that is not articulable in propositional terms, because it does not involve the application of a general rule.

[35] This is a common way of stating the dispute between cognitivists and non-cognitivists, where the former affirm and the latter deny the existence of substantial truth conditions for moral sentences (see, e.g., van Roojen 2015: 5).

truth as the successful representation of moral facts by moral sentences[36] and in characterizations of the work of normative judgment as taking exclusively sentential form.[37]

Parallel tendencies are found in influential lines of thought in moral psychology. If all intentional action is, as Elizabeth Anscombe famously put it, intentional under some description (Anscombe 2000: §6), then to be rationally aware of some event *as* a piece of intentional action—say, as morally injurious—is to be aware of something that has already taken discursive shape.[38] A similar point goes for philosophical theories of motivation. In "Internal and External Reasons" (1981) and its sequel, "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame" (1995), Bernard Williams expresses the influential view that an agent has reason to ϕ only if the conclusion to ϕ can be reached via a "sound deliberative route" from some member of the agent's existing desires and commitments. Though Williams himself was explicitly critical of the restriction of moral meaningfulness to that which can be made explicit by "discursive rationality,"[39] this has not prevented many contemporary Williams-inspired theories of moral motivation from characterizing one's subjective motivational set in wholly

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[36] Take for example, standard accounts of the debate between moral realism and anti-realism. The current *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s entry on "Moral Realism" defines it as the view that moral assertions purport to report facts about reality, that such assertions are true in virtue of their getting the facts right, and that at least some of these assertions are true (Sayre-McCord 2015). In the same vein, it is typical to find the phrase, "moral fact," defined as a feature of the world that (a) makes the content of moral sentences true and (b) can be represented by moral sentences (cf. Cuneo 2006: 36). Such characterizations imply that the objective layout of ethical life is, ultimately, a matter of what can be truthfully represented in sentential or discursive form.

[37] For example, a recent defense of error theory defines a normative judgment as a mental state that "can be expressed with a sentence that conceptually entails that something satisfies a normative predicate" (Streumer 2017: 2).

[38] Though Anscombe herself holds in *Intention* that we can ascribe intentions to creatures who lack discursive capacities (2000: §47, p. 86). I am not claiming here that Anscombe held the discursive theory of meaning, but that her "under a description" doctrine can easily be taken to imply it. For Anscombe's own elaboration of her use of the phrase, see Anscombe 1979.

[39] For example, in the Preface to *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams writes that, "certain interpretations of reason and clear understanding as discursive rationality have damaged ethical thought itself and distorted our conceptions of it" (Williams 1985: viii).

discursive terms. An example is Kate Manne's depiction of serious pain states as already embodying the discursive form of an "imperative" (Manne 2017), as well as her account of all desires as embodying a "call for action" structure that can be expressed formally as *Subject S would be willing for agent A to X in service of some end of S's E* (Manne 2014). Though a theory of this sort does not require that desiring agents themselves actually apprehend or express their own desires in precisely these discursive terms, it nevertheless presupposes that desire in general takes the logical shape of a proposition that can, from the theorist's perspective at least, be definitively spoken or written down. Once again, it is not that time is taken to argue against the notion of proto-discursive moral meaning; rather, it is that the very possibility of such meaning is left out as a matter of method.

Finally, the discursive theory of meaning underwrites all philosophical depictions of moral thought that take as paradigmatic the application of discursively formulable moral rules to cases. The tendency is to treat a special type of discursive unit, the *moral judgment*, as the basic building block of ethical thought and practice in a way that parallels the thesis of the priority of the propositional in semantic theories. In this context, a "moral judgment" refers to a predicative act ascribing moral values or properties to an object (for example, an action-type, disposition, or social structure). This predicative act can be made explicit with moral words like 'good', 'ought', or 'wrong' and the resulting propositions are suitable for serving as premises in chains of practical reasoning: "*x* is a good trait to cultivate in a human life," "People ought to *y* under such-and-such conditions," "Complicity in social arrangement *z* is wrong." The aim of moral thought, then, is to inferentially combine overt moral judgments like these with morally-relevant descriptions of situations—"Here is an opportunity to cultivate *x*"; "I am facing such-and-such conditions"; "I am complicit in *z*"—in order to yield recommendations about how to live and act. The result is an exercise of practical reasoning that is discursive without remainder.

The model is simple yet powerful. For it provides a clear picture of the rational criticism of ordinary ethical reflection, insofar as traditional canons of logical and epistemic assessment unambiguously apply. It is also remarkably flexible, for the moral judgments serving as the first premise can range over a wide spectrum of abstraction and concreteness, from, say, purportedly universal moral principles like Kant's formula of humanity and the principle of utility to highly contextual moral judgments about the rights and wrongs of particular situations.[40] On this conception, then, moral thought consists paradigmatically in discursive activities like the endorsement, rejection, and assertion of moral principles; the derivation of secondary or intermediate principles therefrom; the endorsement of relevant descriptions of particular situations; and applications of principles to those descriptions.[41]

Thus, it is fair to conclude that an often-tacit commitment to a conception of moral meaningfulness as discursive all the way down has significantly shaped trends in metaethical, moral psychological, and normative registers of contemporary ethical theory. Substantiating this exegetical claim was the main aim of this section. Much of this book will be devoted to recovering a notion of

[40] In fact, even some forms of particularism could, in theory, adhere to the wholly discursive view, as long as they held that the basic unit of moral meaning was a discursively articulable judgment concerning the morally salient features of situations.

[41] A relevant area of debate here is the so-called "problem of relevant descriptions," which concerns how best to supply the content in a Kantian maxim of action (see, e.g., O'Neill 2013: chap. 2; Herman 1993: chap. 4; and Kitcher 2003). A classical formulation of the problem comes from Anscombe, who complains that "[Kant's] rule about universalizable maxims is useless without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it" (1958: 2). To the extent that the participants in this debate typically characterize the agent's predicament as that of having to choose amongst competing (and thus already discursively articulate) descriptions of an act, rather than the struggle to forge and find the concepts that make up those descriptions in the first place, it remains comfortably within the constraints of the discursive theory of meaning. Mark Timmons, for example, describes the problem as that of "specifying which descriptions of one's action and circumstances are relevant for purposes of moral evaluation and which of them, consequently, should be reflected in one's maxim" (1997: 399).

moral meaning that moves us beyond this frame. Before moving on, however, let me indicate in a more gestural way what I find suspect about the tendency in ethical theory I have been foregrounding.

The wholly discursive view of moral meaning leads to a certain ideal of agency. The ideal agent is one whose practical deliberations can be made explicit in discursive terms as a set of sound principles of action combined with accurate descriptions of the situations over which the agent deliberates. Their intentions could be captured in maxims that could be, ideally, definitively written down, and the resultant actions would fall under descriptions that wholly capture the moral meaning of what they do.[42] Enjoying flawless discursive capacities, if anyone failed to understand their utterances about moral matters, the fault would lie entirely on the side of the hearer. Of course, no one thinks this ideal is attainable, including its defenders. But that is what ideals are for, to give us a vision of perfection worth striving for, even as we continually fall short.

I want to argue, however, that this ideal is false. I do not mean merely that it is unrealistic or that we never actually attain it, for that sort of objection would leave untouched the notion that this picture of agency is worth striving for as a regulative ideal. Rather, I think this simply should not be our ideal, regulative or otherwise. This purportedly 'ideal' agent would never experience curiosity or wonder in the face of an elusive intimation of value. They could experience neither hopeful anticipation as they tested new concepts against their elusive experience nor the distinctive pleasures

[42] See, for example, Railton's idealized agent, "A+," who has "complete and vivid knowledge of himself and his environment, and whose instrumental rationality is in no way defective" (Railton 1997: 142). Closely related is Korsgaard's characterization of the ideal sort of moral agent in her book, *Self-Constitution*, when she writes that "On certain occasions, the people with other [non-ideal] constitutions fall apart. For the truly just person, the aristocratic soul, there are no such occasions. Anything could happen to her, anything at all, and she will still follow her own principles—and that is because she has universal principles, principles that can consistently be followed in any case (2009: 180). What I am suggesting here is that this sort of invulnerability to "falling apart" in the face of reality can, in certain circumstances, be a serious moral deficiency, insofar as it forecloses the possibility of moral change.

that can accompany resolving a difficulty or seeing oneself through a conceptual confusion. They would be without the satisfactions that come from viewing one's own narrative as one of maturation. Such a conception of ideal agency relegates the phases of childhood through which one continually grows out of existing conceptual frames and develops new ones as a necessary non-ideal stage, and not one to be valued as part of our ideal picture of agency itself. If one could whisper an incantation that allowed one magically to skip the process of learning and upbringing, jumping straight to discursive perfection, nothing valuable would be lost. This conception of ideal agency assumes, moreover, that discursive breakdown and elusive meaning are never constituents of experiences that are valuable in themselves, as is often held to be the case in certain forms of aesthetic experience (cf. Murdoch 1971 and Adorno 1991).

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In short, never to experience discursive breakdown and elusive meanings would leave us without a great range of human goods. It is, at the very least, an open question whether a life without such goods is one we actually want, let alone one we ought to regard as a regulative ideal with philosophical backing. It is, therefore, at least questionable whether we should valorize the ideal agent who comes along with the discursive theory of meaning.

In contrast with this view, I hold that a good life is one that is continually open to the possibility of deep transformation and growth, and so the best sort of agent will be one who works hard to develop a rational vulnerability to the experience of discursive breakdown, and who reshapes their scheme of concepts in the right ways, at the right times. This is especially urgent for humans like us who inhabit bad forms of life, who must cope with unjust social institutions, and who are forced to develop moral understandings under conditions of ideology that make suffering and injustice

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difficult to see clearly.[43] Yet even if our form of life were good, even if we lived in a decent, just, non-ideological society, it would still be true that living well would involve, at its heart, continual confrontations with discursive breakdown and the forms of moral articulation it calls forth. For moral growth is not merely a necessary *means* to a good human life but an essential part of that very life and its goodness.[44] We therefore inherit a distorted vision of moral thought and practical reason when we hold it to an ideal of discursive completeness. For, on the view I defend, discursive breakdown and proto-discursive experience are constitutive of moral thought, not only as non-ideal instances in which we fall short of discursive perfection, but as healthy and productive stages in the ongoing ethical task of seeing the world clearly.[45] This task is never finished because of the historically dynamic nature of ethical life, and its continual resistance to any final, conceptual articulation, even as its conceptual articulation proves to be something we cannot do without.[46] As we move and as we look, the landscape

[43] This is related to Adorno's insistence that "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (2005: 39). It is especially under the conditions of a "wrong life" of unjust social institutions and ideology that we should not strive for an ideal of agency free of discursive breakdown.

[44] There is a resonance here with what Talbot Brewer calls "dialectical activities": "Dialectical activities are a familiar part of almost any human life. The category includes all those activities whose point lies in an intrinsic goodness that is to some considerable degree opaque to those who lack experience with the activity, but that tends to unveil itself incrementally as one gains first-hand experience with it" (Brewer 2009: 39). The activity of moral articulation—which involves confronting discursive breakdown in the face of an elusive importance, striving to find new concepts and words to articulate it, and remaking oneself in the process—is a "dialectical activity" in Brewer's sense. For illuminating discussions of Brewer that are relevant to this point, see Bennett (forthcoming) and Stern (forthcoming).

[45] My point here parallels Bernard Williams' critique of a similarly false ideal of epistemic agency, namely, the ideal of an agent who has, once and for all, overcome all error and ignorance: "Not to know everything is . . . a condition of having a life—some things are unknown, for instance, because they will form one's future. If you cannot coherently want to know everything, then you also cannot coherently want never to be in error. . . . [Y]ou must make errors, and recognize them, if you are going to extend such knowledge as you have" (1985: 57–8).

[46] This anticipates claims I defend at more length in the chapters to come. Though a historically dynamic picture of ethical life recurs throughout the book at a whole, it receives sustained defense in Chapters 4 and 5. I return to the idea that moral articulation is perpetually ongoing in Chapter 6 (§6.2).

of ethical life is changing, and so our concepts try to catch up. If that is right, then a moral agent immune to discursive breakdown would miss something ethically important about the world—perhaps the world itself. That, at least, is one of the major themes sounded in this book.

1.4. Changing Conceptual Schemes

I have been arguing that certain cases of discursive breakdown involve confrontations with meaningful experiences that bear some degree of organization and form, despite their resisting discursive apprehension and articulation, and that such experiences are crucial for moral growth. When we consider these claims in relation to the discursive theory of meaning, we face a choice: explain away the phenomena of discursive breakdown and proto-discursive experience or reject the theory that would have us explain them away. So far, my exploration of discursive breakdown has tried to lend support to the latter option. In this section, I want to strengthen my claim that the discursive theory should be rejected by arguing that a certain kind of change in our discursive repertoires requires, as a necessary condition for its possibility, notions of elusion-based discursive breakdown and proto-discursive experience. I do so by developing some ideas in Iris Murdoch about the role of conceptual change in moral growth.[47] A core idea here will be that, in the cases I discuss, the needed form of conceptual change is not only a matter of inventing new concepts that "fill in the gaps," so to speak,

[47] For the purposes of the present section, I shall treat cases of conceptual change and discursive change more or less interchangeably. That is, I shall temporarily focus upon cases in which a transformation in an individual or community's scheme of concepts goes hand in hand with a transformation in the ways they use language to express those concepts. This is required, in part, to incorporate Murdoch's preferred language of "conceptual schemes" into our present discussion of discursive breakdown. In fact, however, the situation is more complex. As I shall argue in Chapter 2, there exists an important range of cases in which conceptual change must get started without the help of simultaneous transformations in one's discursive repertoires. To explain such cases, we need a flexible notion of conceptuality that does not necessarily take discursive shape (see, esp., §2.1).

within an existing conceptual framework, but of a more fundamental transformation of our conceptual frameworks themselves, whether that means transforming a framework substantially from within or transitioning to a different framework altogether.[48] The intelligibility of such transformations, I argue, presupposes the notions of elusion-based discursive breakdown and proto-discursive experience I have been outlining.

In her essay, "The Idea of Perfection," Murdoch offers an example of individual moral transformation, which begins as follows.

> A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M Does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. (Murdoch 1971: 16–7)

[48] The examples of new moral concepts invoked at the beginning of the Introduction—'sexual harassment', 'hate speech', 'child abuse', etc.—are sometimes described as conceptual innovations that fill in "gaps" or "lacunas" within existing moral vocabularies. For example, Miranda Fricker (2007: chap. 7) sometimes speaks this way in her discussion of "hermeneutical injustice." Her leading example is the case of someone who experiences what we are now in a position to name 'sexual harassment' in a time and place still lacking the critical concept. In describing this sort of case, Fricker returns to the metaphor of "gaps or lacunas" in a community's shared set of conceptual resources, or as she also puts it, "blanks where there should be a name for an experience which it is in the interests of the subject to be able to render communicatively intelligible" (160). Though taken by itself this metaphor need not commit Fricker to an atomistic view of conceptual change, this picture of the problem can lead to a complementary picture of the sort of conceptual change that would serve as the solution, and thus some theorists, following Fricker, describe the required task as that of "fill[ing] in the gaps" (Maitra 2018: 1). An atomistic view is also implied in some places by Richardson, who embraces the idea that morality bears an invariant moral core, yet which contains indeterminacies that require "filling in." For instance, Richardson writes that new moral norms, "simply fill in the gaps left by the preexisting objective moral principles" (2018: 185).

Though Murdoch does not use words like "class" in her telling of the story, a natural reading of the example is that M's disapproval of D is the result of her imprisonment within a mid-century British bourgeois picture of class hierarchy and the social ranking it entails. This culturally learned framework of interpretation prevents the attainment of a just, loving, and clear-sighted vision of D, reducing her to a stereotype.

Yet M is not a static character and the story does not end here. Murdoch goes on to describe a transformation of M's vision of D:

> Time passes, and it could be M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned . . . by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again." . . . [G]radually her vision of D alters. . . . D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. (17)

We can think of M's initial perception of D as having been shaped by a more general cognitive orientation towards the world, one that includes, among other things, a tendency to sort people by perceived social class. Murdoch sometimes describes a person's cognitive orientation towards the world in terms of their inhabiting a particular "scheme of concepts" or "conceptual scheme" (see, e.g.,

1971: 31, 43).[49] M's initial descriptions of D—that she is "vulgar," "undignified," "noisy," etc.—express concepts belonging to one such scheme, which shapes her habits of perception. The mediating role of M's conceptual scheme runs deep, helping to shape not only her explicitly avowed judgments ("My son has married beneath him") but also subtle perceptions on the edge of consciousness (M's dislike for D's accent). If M's initial vision of D is shaped by a conceptual scheme in this way, then a transformation of vision, such that M comes to view D "justly and lovingly," as Murdoch puts it, will require a transformation of conceptual scheme. The point I wish to highlight is that coming to see D justly and lovingly is not a matter of simply noticing details about D that M had previously missed, and so "filling in the gaps" of her existing conceptual scheme, but of changing her concepts in a more thoroughgoing way, of coming to understand—if only vaguely—the distorting effects of her initial conceptual scheme and subjecting that scheme itself to critical scrutiny.

To foreground the sort of conceptual change needed here, notice a distinction between two ways M might criticize and revise her own assessment that D is, socially speaking, "beneath" her son. (i) On the one hand, she might come to believe that D possesses features that reveal her initial judgment to be false. She comes to believe, for instance, that D's parents are in fact wealthy and descended from nobility, that D was educated at the best schools, that she was just putting on that accent and wearing those clothes as a joke, and so on. This would be to revise her initial judgment ("My son has married beneath him") while respecting the conceptual scheme in which it was formed. People are still to be ranked according to socio-economic class, and features like dress and accent are reliable markers of how they are to be ranked, but the way she ranked D was mistaken. (ii) On the other hand, she might question whether D (or anyone, for that matter) is best judged within the terms of this conceptual scheme at all, and, moreover, whether D possesses qualities that this conceptual

[49] The notion of a "conceptual scheme" is, of course, controversial (see, especially, Davidson 1973). I discuss this notion, defending a version of conceptualism in Chapter 2.

scheme obscures. This would be to scrutinize not only her initial judgment but also the conceptual scheme in which it was formed. While both sorts of self-criticism challenge M's initial judgment of D, it is the latter that is required for seeing D justly and lovingly, and so serves for Murdoch as the model for a deeper sort of moral change that cannot be achieved via minor additions to one's conceptual schemes, but only through a more thoroughgoing transformation, perhaps even wholesale rejection, of those schemes themselves.

Let me add a second example that illustrates the difference between voicing a grievance within a conceptual scheme and raising a grievance about a conceptual scheme. In a society that organizes life around a conceptual scheme of private property, it is easy to identify certain kinds of action, like *theft* and *property damage*, as wrongs. It is more difficult, and requires a shift of perspective, to claim the existence of wrongs inflicted by the conceptual scheme of private property itself.[50] This difficulty is vividly portrayed in Vittorio de Sica's 1948 film, *Bicycle Thieves*. The film follows a destitute working-class man, Antonio, and his son, Bruno, as they search the streets of post-World War II Rome for a stolen bicycle, which Antonio needs for his new job of posting ad bills around the city. His wife, Maria, pawns the family bed sheets to pay for the bicycle only for it to be stolen on the first day of the job. As father and son travel from one social institution to another—the police, his workers' union, the market, a church, their home—Antonio is only ever able to articulate that he has been the victim of a *theft*. What remains unspoken, yet which is tragically manifest in Antonio's decision to steal a bicycle

[50] This is one of Jean-François Lyotard's examples of a *differend*, a conflict which occurs when one is morally injured in a way that is neither recognizable nor reparable under current conditions, given the lack of a moral or legal framework shared by the injured party and the person or community to whom the injured party appeals. He writes, "economic and social law can regulate the litigation between economic and social partners but not the differend between labor power and capital" (Lyotard 1988: §13). I discuss Lyotard's views in relation to some of the concerns raised in this chapter in Congdon 2016.

of his own at the film's end, is the more fundamental injustice of a socio-economic order in which poor people must steal from each other in order to survive.[51]

What I want from this example is a case in which a kind of discursive limit is reached in the face of injustice, which results not from a gap within an otherwise satisfactory conceptual scheme, but from a more thoroughgoing failure of that conceptual scheme, such that it must either be subjected to deep structural transformation or replaced by a different scheme altogether. Specifically, a conceptual scheme organized around concepts like *theft* and *private property* has swallowed up, so to speak, Antonio's interpretation of the injustice he suffers. He knows he has been wronged, and he turns to this framework to articulate a grievance. The concept of *theft* suggests itself, and he applies it appropriately and without error. For it is true that his bicycle has been stolen, and so his grievance can be voiced authoritatively as long as it remains within this conceptual framework. If we focus solely upon Antonio's ability to name and identify the wrong of theft, then we shall find no discursive breakdown.[52] When making a grievance about theft, one can do so within the conceptual scheme of capitalist property relations. But what if the grievance one wishes to make is against the conceptual scheme of capitalist property relations itself? What if what is needed to articulate the conditions of crushing poverty that the film depicts cannot be provided by filling in the gaps of the existing framework? Suppose we gradually conclude that conceptions of *exploitation*, *alienation*, and *domination* are better equipped to articulate the deeper injustice Antonio faces. Are we simply adding new

[51] Here I am following André Bazin: "The thesis implied [by *Bicycle Thieves*] is wondrously and outrageously simple: in the world where this workman lives, the poor must steal from each other in order to survive. But this thesis is never stated as such, it is just that events are so linked together that they have the appearance of a formal truth while retaining anecdotal quality" (2005: 51).

[52] Earlier I drew the distinction between the meaning of an event *simply eluding one* and one's experiencing some event *as elusive*. As I read the film, Antonio focuses so exclusively on the wrong of *theft* that his condition is closer to the former. Yet it may provoke for the viewer an experience closer to the latter.

concepts to the initial scheme? Or has our conceptual scheme undergone a more fundamental shift? I think the latter better captures the case at hand, for without a thoroughgoing transformation of conceptual scheme, Antonio will be forced to speak within the terms of the very social structures that wrong him.

Once we notice the basic distinction between challenging a claim within a conceptual scheme and challenging the conceptual scheme itself, it is not difficult to find examples of it everywhere. It is the difference between challenging the claim that a woman is "unchaste" by arguing that she is, in fact, chaste and challenging the paradigm of morality that requires chastity as a virtue. It is the difference between challenging a denunciation of Cézanne's portrait of Hortense for failing to resemble the actual Hortense by arguing that the actual Hortense really did look *just like that* and rejecting the conceptual scheme of photorealism as a way of appreciating a Cézanne. It is the difference between revealing that Antonio was not, in fact, the victim of a theft (imagine that, years from now, a bit of lost footage reveals that the bike was only borrowed by a friend and happily returned!) and criticizing the conceptual scheme of theft for deflecting our attention from systemic and crushing poverty. In short, the distinction arises wherever there is not just one scheme of evaluation with respect to a particular object, but potentially many, leading to the possibility that up for evaluation is the scheme of evaluation itself (cf. Murdoch 1997: 81).

We are now in a position to draw a connection to our earlier discussion of discursive breakdown (§1.1). I said that the experience of discursive breakdown can, under certain circumstances, be more than just a moment of cognitive dysfunction, insofar as our consciousness shifts into a higher reflexive gear, moving from the object itself to the quality of one's discursively mediated relation to the object. We can now think of this in terms of the shift from attending to an object within a conceptual scheme to the higher-order scrutiny of the conceptual scheme itself. I also spoke earlier of *proto-discursive* meanings that elude discursive expression yet bear structure and invite further

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exploration. When the conceptual schemes we presently inhabit strike us an inadequate, and so require some sort of structural transformation, proto-discursive experience is one of the key resources we have to work with. For the transformation must involve a transitional moment in which one does not yet clearly apprehend what a new and improved conceptual scheme would involve, yet glimpses something elusive and important from within one's existing schemes, if only darkly and distortedly. That this is so in many cases of individual moral conceptual growth seems inevitable, for the work of coming into language in early childhood, as well as ongoing growth and maturation in adulthood, never ceases to present us with experiences, feelings, and challenges from others that disrupt and frustrate the limits of our conceptual powers as they stand. Yet it also appears to be applicable to larger-scale social cases of conceptual change, where we wish to speak not merely of *individual* proto-discursive experiences had by isolated agents, but *socially-repeated patterns* of proto-discursive experience that call out for the expansion and transformation of shared conceptual schemes.

good example

Consider some of our earlier examples. When you feel an inchoate sense of anger at your boss, the experience is characterized not only by the felt limits of one's discursive means, but also the faint apprehension that something is there to be pursued and more clearly formulated. If we imagine this example takes place prior to the mid-seventies, perhaps what is needed (among other things) is the development of a new conceptual scheme that includes the concept, 'sexual harassment'. This latter thought can be nourished if your experience turns out not to be an idiosyncrasy of your own individual life situation, but part of a socially-repeated pattern of proto-discursive experience that can be shared, explored, and developed in solidarity with others, say, in the context of a feminist consciousness raising group. At both the individual and social levels, the initial proto-discursive experience occurs prior to the existence of the new conceptual scheme in which it can be, retroactively, clearly articulated. In a similar spirit, we need not suppose that a viewer of *Bicycle Thieves* knows exactly what the right conceptual scheme for articulating Antonio's suffering might be, even as they apprehend that there is

something crucial that the conceptual scheme of theft misses. But if that apprehension occurs, it must occur prior to (because it is a precondition for) the development of a new and better conceptual scheme. It is these sorts of intimations that something important lies just beyond one's discursive grasp that I am calling "proto-discursive." My claim, then, is not just that our picture of moral meaningfulness needs to be expanded to include forms beyond the discursive, but that certain proto-discursive forms are, at least in the cases we have considered, preconditions for the development of moral discourse itself. For the cases of moral conceptual growth I have been tracking begin with and depend upon an engagement with proto-discursive meanings. This means rejecting a picture of moral meaningfulness as discursive all the way down.

1.5. The Expressive Logic of Articulation

Let me sum up my argument so far. Certain experiences of discursive breakdown confront us with proto-discursive meanings, that is, forms of meaning that cry out for discursive articulation even as they confound our received discursive frameworks (§1.1). To say this much already raises controversy, for the very idea of proto-discursive experience requires that we challenge a theory of meaning as discursive all the way down (§1.2), a theory that tacitly shapes significant portions of contemporary ethical theory (§1.3). This leaves us with a choice: we must either explain away the phenomenon or reject the theory that would have us explain it away. The previous section (§1.4) made a case for the latter by arguing that certain instances of moral conceptual growth that involve fundamental transformations in our received conceptual schemes are best explained via a picture of meaning that includes the notion of proto-discursive experience.

In order to solidify this thought, we need an alternative to the theory that models moral meaning on the logical form of a discursively explicit proposition. The alternative model I sketch in

this section, and go on to develop in this book as a whole, is centered on the concept of *articulation*. I have in mind Charles Taylor's (1985; 2016) use of the term, "articulation," to refer to the activity of expressing inchoate experiences of significance—unformed desires, cloudy senses of what is important, unstructured emotions—in ways that reshape experience and create new meanings. Explaining this idea will allow us to provide a preliminary sketch of the central concept on offer in this book, *moral articulation*.

To get into this idea, we may begin, as Taylor does, by distinguishing *articulations*, directed at ourselves, our feelings, and our evaluations, with *descriptions*, which target more or less stable external objects. In seeking to express one's inchoate sense of an artwork's beauty, one's feelings of love, or one's angered sense of violation, we seek out words or images that place our feelings in a certain light, that help us make sense of our experience. As the discussion of the previous section suggests, this may mean either developing new concepts that transform a conceptual scheme from within or, more radically, seeking out new conceptual schemes altogether. A sustained effort to articulate a latent sense of meaningfulness often does more than simply lift an obscure feeling into the light of discursive clarity. Rather, as one interprets one's own feelings, seeking out new conceptual schemes within which they can make sense, those feelings are shaped, leant fresh determinacy and structure, such that the 'object' of articulation can become something different than it was prior to one's efforts of self-interpretation. To work upon a vague feeling of affection and seek out words for it, or to give sustained interpretive attention to a dissonant feeling of anger and agitation at one's boss, is apt to transform the very feelings one seeks to interpret. This is unlike simple descriptions of self-standing objects, as when we say that "Mars has an iron-rich surface" or "is 4,208 miles in diameter." While such descriptions may transform our understanding of Mars, they do not transform Mars itself. Yet insofar as one's self-understanding is part of who one is and who one is becoming, a transformation in one's

self-understanding is, *ipso facto*, a transformation of oneself. The aim of articulation is not only to discover oneself, but to become oneself, through self-interpretive activity.

The point in claiming that articulation has this transformative power is not to argue that, in articulating the meaning of one's own desires, feelings, and inchoate evaluations, the self-interpreter is free simply to make things up as they go. In articulating an elusive experience of meaning, Taylor writes, "it is not exactly that I have no yardstick, in the sense that anything goes, but rather that what takes the place of the yardstick is my deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate and which I am trying to bring to definition. I am trying to see reality afresh and form more adequate categories to describe it" (Taylor 1985: 41–2). The proto-discursive meanings we have been discussing—a latent sense of beauty, an elusive feeling of love, a rush of dissonant anger—preexist one's explicit efforts of articulation, and those meanings purport to reflect features of the world which we do not simply will into existence or will away. Thus, there is a genuine sense in which articulation must strive to be faithful to an 'object' that precedes it and, hence, can range from the discerning to the deluded. One can give a false or distorted interpretation of the nature and sources of one's own anger, one can misconstrue one's own feelings of love, and one can do a better or worse job of articulating an experience of an artwork. In such ways, misarticulations are possible. Yet at the same time, the 'object' of articulation is not something fully formed and intact prior to its expression in language, in quite the same way as a planet waiting to be discovered. Articulation follows an *expressive logic*, meaning that what it expresses is not something wholly determined in advance of expression, but rather comes to be what it is at least partially as the result of its own expression.[53] Articulation has this structure: it brings something to light, just as it develops what it brings to light.

[53] By calling this "expressive" I have in mind a line of thinking about language found in figures like Herder, Hegel, and Wittgenstein, who urge in different ways that the human life-form is so deeply entwined with language and expressivity that we, to a significant extent, become who we are as a result of expressing who we are. See, e.g., Herder's writings on the origin of language, in which he urges that

My thesis here is that the expressive logic of articulation is at play when we work to expand and revise our evaluative vocabularies. For example, suppose I value *courage* but understand it in an immature way: I think courage is the elimination of fear (and cowardice fear's presence). Time goes on and I work to articulate why courage is important to me, gradually realizing that there exist situations in which the absence of fear is not a manifestation of human excellence but recklessness or hubris. Suppose, moreover, that this insight comes along with refinements in my evaluative vocabulary, as I acquire a new word, "rashness," to name reckless and hubristic instances of fearlessness. The introduction of the new term changes my evaluative vocabulary, not only in the obvious sense that a new term has been introduced alongside the old, but also in the more holistic sense that the appearance of the new term alters the sense of the existing terms. Once *rashness* is part of my conceptual scheme, *courage*, if it is to remain the name of a virtue, can no longer mean the "elimination of fear," just as *cowardice* can no longer simply mean its presence. Though the same word, "courage," was used both before, during, and after this process of articulation, what I value now is different from what I valued at the beginning.[54] And yet it is nevertheless part of a continuous arc of self-interpretation, and so the sense of 'courage' I end up with is a result of my efforts to articulate an intimation of the value of 'courage' I had at the beginning. I have not merely *described* my initial,

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language, along with the special form of reflection language enables, is "essential to [our] species" (2002: 87). In Hegel, see his *Anthropology*'s treatment of the notion that expressions of spirit (*Geist*) are not external to the thing they express, but constitute spirit's actual development (2007: §383). From Wittgenstein arises the tradition of "ordinary language philosophy," a central tenet of which is that language is not just a tool for communication, but constitutive of a "form of life" in which shared meanings and practices take on actuality (see, e.g., 2009: §19). This use of "expressive" should be carefully distinguished from any reference to the family of non-cognitivist, anti-realist positions in metaethics sometimes called "expressivism" (see, e.g., Gibbard 2003 and Schroeder 2008). For the expressive tradition Taylor builds upon holds out for the possibilities of both the knowledge and existence of value in the world.

[54] Cf. Murdoch: "Words may mislead us here since words are often stable while concepts alter; we have a different image of courage at forty from that which we had at twenty. A deepening process, at any rate an altering and complicating process, takes place" (Murdoch 1971: 28).

inchoate sense of the importance of courage—I have *articulated* it.[55] I can, moreover, *mis*articulate it, which means not only getting that initial sense wrong, but also shaping that sense in potentially distorted ways. In misarticulating the importance of courage, say, by attaching it to a macho ideal of unwavering self-confidence, I risk not only deluding myself about the value this virtue may play in my life, but actively shaping aspects of myself and, potentially, social reality around me, in morally pernicious directions.[56] As Taylor puts it, "articulations are attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated. But this kind of formation or reformulation does not leave its object unchanged. To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or what we hold important in a certain way" (Taylor 1985: 36). The object of articulation, in our case, a proto-discursive experience in the midst of discursive breakdown, is not a self-standing object already fully intact and normatively determinate, but is shaped, its significance deepened, by our very efforts to express it.

We can connect this with the previous section's discussion of cases in which what is needed is not just the filling in of this or that concept, but a more radical overhaul of one's received conceptual schemes. While we might initially be tempted to think of the invention of new moral concepts like 'sexual harassment' as atomistic additions to an existing moral vocabulary that otherwise remains unchanged, we often do better to view them as part of broader, holistic transformations of our

[55] As this example indicates, understanding and evaluation are inseparable in articulation. Coming to understand an experience is to evaluate it in some way, such that a transformation in understanding is, *ipso facto*, a transformation in valuing.

[56] As Taylor writes, "Because of this double fact, because an articulation can be *wrong*, and yet it shapes what it is wrong about, we sometimes see erroneous articulations as involving a distortion of the reality concerned" (1985: 38). This will be a theme in Chapter 4, when I discuss such misarticulations in connection with the idea that unjust ideologies not only get reality wrong, but shape reality in their image.

received conceptual schemes.[57] Writing about the case of sexual harassment, Linda Martín Alcoff describes the transformation in terms that fit the expressive logic of articulation:

> [O]ur ability to name experiences can in some cases change their shape and their affective texture. Consider again the case of sexual harassment, in which the term we use to classify the experience changes it from amorphous or generic aggravation to a specific and remediable injustice, or from 'women's lot in life' to communally sanctioned harm. There is a rather sensitive relationship between the way life appears and feels, and the conceptual repertoire we have available to us to describe it. And changes in the terms by which we bring experiences under a description can affect the actual things themselves—especially in so far as these are experiences—that are referred to by the terms. (Alcoff 2010: 136)

To try to understand such conceptual shifts on the model of straightforward *description* would be to ignore the transformative aspects Alcoff alludes to here. Her point is not the anti-realist claim that the invention of terms like "sexual harassment" bring into existence forms of wrongdoing that did not exist prior to their expression in discourse. Rather, it is the more subtle, expressive thesis that attempts a careful balance between (i) the idea that terms like "sexual harassment" refer to real and morally significant experiences of suffering and (ii) the idea that acts of conceptualization and naming can

[57] We need not rule out cases in which the development of a new concept comes closer to "filling in gaps." Some cases may be more transformative than others. Arguably, for example, the development of the term, 'cyberbullying', in the late 1990s left existing notions of 'bullying', 'harassment', and related concepts relatively unchanged, simply updating our vocabulary to reflect a new way that technology mediates our capacity to wrong one another. Yet the cases that form my paradigm in this book are better understood as involving the more holistic transformations described above. I develop this point at more length, focusing again on the case of the concept, 'sexual harassment', in Chapter 2, §2.1.

have deeply transformative effects upon those very experiences. In order to understand such a shift in our ethical conceptual schemes, therefore, we should adopt the model of *articulation*.

overall aim:

With this in place, I want to take a step back and restate the general aim of this book. Inspired by Taylor's original concept, my aim is to explore the process of *moral articulation*, the dynamic activity of forming new words and conceptual schemes in order to bring previously inchoate, unprecedented, or marginalized forms of moral experience to expression, in ways that allow the sharing of moral meanings for a broader collective. This will involve tracing the process of new moral concept development through the stages I have briefly indicated in this chapter: the experience of discursive breakdown in the face of a morally significant reality; the transformation of our historically inculcated schemes of concepts; and a renewed expression of the object of articulation, in the double sense that the object is both brought to light and developed anew. Though in practice the process of moral articulation may not neatly follow these steps in precise order, they give us a formal picture of the historical process under investigation. My contention is that the historical development of new moral concepts follows, at least in many significant cases, the expressive logic of articulation: they purport to be faithful to intimations of value that precede their expression in language, yet simultaneously have transformative effects, such that the 'object' of moral articulation is not left unchanged, and the landscape of ethical life is altered. Just how this alteration occurs and the shapes it can take will be the subject of the chapters to come.

realism

The view that results is a form of *historicized moral realism*. It is a form of *realism* insofar as it allows for the notion that the inchoate experiences of moral significance we attempt to articulate are, at least in some cases, modes of rational responsiveness to a value-laden world. On this view, the forms of suffering and moral injury articulated by terms like 'hate speech' and 'sexual harassment' were already imbued with ethical meanings that called for acknowledgment and response long before their expression in language with these precise labels. These are meanings we are free neither to will

into existence nor will away. Yet unlike variations of moral realism which posit an immutable ethical foundation or a special domain of unchanging moral facts, this is a *historicized* variation of moral realism historicized in a dual sense: (i) first, at an epistemic level, it holds that our modes of access to this value-laden world are invariably mediated by our historically and culturally concrete conceptual schemes (or, more broadly, our linguistic traditions and forms of life); and (ii) at an ontological level, it makes room for the idea that the ethical life-form we bear is itself a historical result, at least in significant part, of our ongoing efforts to articulate it. For as I shall argue in later chapters, the conditions of human flourishing are themselves articulated, and thus are not necessarily left unchanged, by their expression in language. That, at least, is the picture I make a case for in the chapters to come.

1.6. Conclusion

Let us return to the more local problem we have been tracking in earlier sections. How does the expressive logic of articulation bear on the question of proto-discursivity? The theory of meaning discussed in §§1.2–1.3 gives us one model for the logical form of moral meaning: i.e., the *discursively articulable proposition*. In the grips of the idea that *x* is meaningful only if *x's* meaning can be *said* or *asserted*, it will be difficult to see what an alternative to this model might be. One of the salutary aspects of the expressive logic of articulation is that it provides us with a potential alternative, one that is unconstrained by the discursive theory of meaning. It provides us with a model for understanding the cognitive work of moral judgment that includes not only the endorsement, assertion, and inferential manipulation of meanings that have already taken discursive shape, but also the earlier step of piecing together, from the fragments of elusive experience, those very discursive shapes themselves. To be sure, the process of articulation is also a discursive affair: it is the process of working upon an experience, interpreting it, such that it can be expressed intelligibly and with authority. Yet at the core

of the notion of articulation is the idea that this process begins with the experience of meanings that elude our existing discursive powers. It thus provides us with a model for thinking of rational discursive awareness as having proto-discursive preconditions. It is a model for a form of moral thought that, rather than beginning and ending within discourse, forges the connection between proto-discursive experience and its discursive expression in language to others.

It is worth asking, "If the earliest stages of articulation are not yet discursive, why go on insisting they reflect 'rational' or 'cognitive' modes of engagement with the world? Why not go further and say the sorts of meaning in question here are not only non-discursive, but non-rational and non-cognitive as well?" My answer is that there are advantages to working with wider notions of rationality and cognition, such that they extend beyond the explicitly discursive.[58] To be sure, our discursive practices of asserting, inferring, and so on are essential for linguistic creatures like us to be rationally aware of a meaningful world. Yet the logically prior activity of articulation shares several hallmark features of rationality, and so has good claim to be considered an operation of reason or cognition, from its earliest proto-discursive beginnings to its explicit discursive results. Here are four such hallmarks, which I explore in the chapters to come: (i) articulation is *end-directed* or *purposive*, in that it is a matter of finding one's proper orientation in the world; (ii) it is *normative*, in the sense that it admits of degrees of success and failure, and so is the sort of activity one can hold to standards of criticism; (iii) it is *self-reflective*, in the sense I flagged in §1.1 with the metaphor of shifting to a "higher reflexive gear," and, finally, (iv) it is something for which one may take *responsibility* and be held to account by others through rational forms of criticism.[59] All four are hallmarks of traditional conceptions of both

[58] I borrow the metaphor of a "wider" notion of rationality from Crary 2007 and 2016.

[59] Speaking in favor of the primacy of the propositional, Brandom writes, "Judgments are fundamental, since they are the minimal unit one can take *responsibility* for on the cognitive side, just as actions are the corresponding unit of responsibility on the practical side" (Brandom 2000: 160). By suggesting that we can be held accountable for our activities of articulation, I am suggesting that responsibility can come in a step earlier than the endorsement of a judgment: i.e., the formation of the discursive

theoretical and practical rationality (a distinction that, incidentally, the activity of articulation blurs[60]). They are, moreover, all essential to the activity of moral articulation. By widening our view of moral meaningfulness and cognition—stepping back from the moves we make within an already established discursive space and exploring the processes of articulation whereby we stitch together that moral discursive space in the first place—we encounter a deep and necessary role for proto-discursive experience.[61]

In this chapter I have focused on the first stage of moral articulation, discursive breakdown, arguing that we require a notion of proto-discursive meaning to make sense of it. So far, this has been a formal claim and defended mainly negatively by arguing that there are limits to a wholly discursive view of moral meaning. The following two chapters offer a more constructive picture of proto-discursive moral meanings by turning to the social epistemology and moral psychology of ethical experience. In Chapter 2, I do this by digging deeper into the notion of conceptuality that I have been assuming here, asking specifically about the relations between concepts, language, and reality. In Chapter 3, I turn to the role emotions play in the process of articulating proto-discursive meanings, focusing on the case of anger. Taken together, these chapters begin to sketch the social epistemological and moral psychological background of moral articulation.

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space within which judgments may be formed at all. On this point, see Taylor: "our articulations, just because they partly shape their objects, engage our responsibility in a way that simple descriptions do not" (Taylor 1985: 38; cf. Murdoch 1971: 34–40, 64, 65).

[60] A classic formulation of the distinction between theoretical and practical rationality is in terms of "direction of fit," where theoretical rationality aims to conform contents of one's mind to features of the world and practical rationality aims to conform features of the world to contents of one's mind (a view sometimes attributed to Anscombe [see 2000: §32]; for a critical discussion, see Frost 2014). We shall find that articulation cannot be sorted neatly into either option without remainder, because both aims are inseparably at stake. Moral articulation is, we could say, simultaneously *world-disclosing* and *world-making*.

[61] I emphasize that "in the first place" here refers to a logical, not temporal, priority. We need not assume a temporally identifiable "first" moment in which moral discourse is stitched together and a "second" moment in which it complete.