DIRECTING THE CONSCIENCE AND CULTIVATING THE MIND: PRACTICAL ETHICS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

In 1794, Dugald Stewart surveyed modern moral philosophy and noted its two parts, "the one comprehending the theory of Morals, and the other its practical doctrines" (Stewart, 1982). Though studies giving serious and often excellent attention to modern British moral philosophy have increased in number recently (e.g. Darwall 1995, K. Haakonssen 1996, Schneewind 1998, Rivers 2000, Harris 2005, Gill 2006), this attention has been limited largely to topics within the theory of morals, which deals with questions such as those concerning the nature and ground of moral judgment, will, and value. *Directing the Conscience and Cultivating the Mind: Practical Ethics in Eighteenth Century Britain* is the first book-length study that examines the *other* part of moral philosophy, namely its "practical doctrines." I am applying for an ACLS fellowship in order to be able to complete this book.

According to Stewart, this other part of moral philosophy comprehended "all those rules of conduct which profess to point out the proper ends of human pursuit, and the most effectual means of attaining them; to which we may add all those literary compositions, whatever be their particular form, which have for their aim to fortify and animate our good dispositions, by delineations of the beauty, of the dignity, or of the utility of Virtue." He captures here the two sides of practical ethics in the eighteenth century. The first presented systems of duties, virtues, or rights, in order to direct the conscience "in the general conduct of human life" (Paley, 2002 [1785]). These taxonomies typically organized duties as those owed to God (in virtue language—"piety"), those owed to ourselves ("prudence" and/or "temperance"), and those owed to others ("benevolence" and "justice"). This variety of practical ethics figured prominently in the writings and lectures of professors and tutors like Hutcheson, Smith, Reid, and Paley.

The second side of practical ethics strove to "fortify and animate our good dispositions" rather than to pursue knowledge for its own sake. The attempt to cultivate the mind and improve conduct and character took two related forms. Many eighteenth century philosophers like Alexander Gerard and David Fordyce understood this part of practical ethics in Baconian terms as a "georgics" or culture of the

mind's moral capacities. A georgics of the mind identified the different types of moral temperament, analyzed diseases of the mind (i.e. various passions), and suggested remedies for those diseases. Other philosophers, relying less on Bacon, emphasized the influence that moving descriptions of moral phenomena could have on readers (Hume famously described this approach to morals by analogy with painting and in contrast to anatomy). Both these styles of moral cultivation produced writing and teaching that often differed dramatically, in form and content, from that found within speculative ethics.

Directing the Conscience and Cultivating the Mind will contribute to the humanities in a number of ways. First, it addresses a serious gap in our picture of the moral philosophy of the period, connects that philosophy more closely to the "general values" that characterize Enlightenment thought (e.g. an interest in bettering the human condition, Sher 2006), and offers new perspectives on major thinkers like Hume, Smith, Hutcheson, Butler, Bentham, and Paley.

Second, this study differs from the majority of works in the philosophical literature by arguing for the relevance of contexts beyond the narrowly textual and philosophical. I show how the significance of many aspects of eighteenth century moral philosophy cannot be gauged properly without an awareness of, for instance, handbooks of Christian ethics (both Anglican and Calvinist) or the changing shape of eighteenth century universities. From confidence that historical texts can be studied in abstraction from non-philosophical 'parochial' and 'ephemeral' concerns, philosophers have often mistaken the meaning and intent of these texts. In so doing, many philosophers have gotten the history wrong, and have thereby also lost the benefit of engaging with thinkers who may conceive of philosophy and its central questions quite differently than they do.

Third, *Directing the Conscience and Cultivating the Mind* anchors present-day applied ethics historically in a way that has not, to my knowledge, been done (though see Beauchamp, 2007; K. Haakonssen, 1990; L. Haakonssen, 1997). Most ethicists think of practical ethics as having its origins in the 1960s and 70s (the founding of *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in 1972 is often used as a convenient marker). In so doing, they ignore a tradition that is recognizably similar in its attempt to guide conduct, but also markedly different, particularly in its intended audience, its more ambitious goals, and in its

greater willingness to offer coherent moral systems meant to direct us in the whole of life (rather than, as in present-day applied ethics, principally in our roles as professionals or citizens). This is not to argue, of course, that we will or should end up preferring eighteenth century models of practical ethics (though this is not out of the question). It is to claim that attention to eighteenth century alternatives will deepen our understanding of what practical ethics can be about and what purposes it can serve.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, though this project's immediate goal is historical, philosophical interests motivate it. In particular, I argue that in order to study the practical ethics of the period we must concentrate throughout on what the purpose of moral philosophy was and on why it mattered. The eighteenth century offered reasons to care about moral philosophy that often emphasized the ways in which philosophy can improve us and that are frequently different from our own. These reasons challenge us to understand, and potentially reconsider, our sense of why philosophy matters today. Are eighteenth century reasons adaptable to our changed circumstances? Do they suggest new topics for philosophical treatment, new ways of writing, or new audiences for philosophical work that make sense for us? Is there such a thing as *expertise* in morals? If so, what constitutes it, who has it, and what kinds of moral failings, if any, can it remedy? A central aim of this study is to engage productively with these questions and provide new conceptual resources for thinking about their answers.

As I envision it, the outline for the monograph includes five sections with twelve chapters, as follows:

Introduction

1. Practical Ethics in English and Scottish Moral Philosophy: Directing the Conscience and Cultivating the Mind

Context

2. Institutional Settings for Moral Philosophy in Eighteenth Century Britain
3. Bringing Philosophy "down from Heaven": Shaftesbury, Addison, and Polite Philosophy
4. Antecedents to Eighteenth Century Practical Ethics

Practical Ethics Part I: Directing the Conscience

5. The Other Part of the "Science of Ethics": The Theory of Morals and the Problem of Scepticism
6. Directing Conscience: Taxonomies of Duties, Virtues, and Rights
7. Relating the Two Parts of Ethics: How Does Metaphysics Affect Morals?

Practical Ethics Part II: Cultivating the Mind

8. Eighteenth Century Accounts of Moral Failing
9. Writing Moral Philosophy: Hutcheson, Hume, and 'Painting' Morals
10. 'A Delicate and an Accurate Pencil': Adam Smith, Description, and Philosophy as Moral Education
11. Mandeville, Licentious Philosophy, and the Threat of Corruption

Practical Ethics Today

12. Ignored Alternatives: Eighteenth Century Insights into the Structure and Purposes of Present-Day Moral Philosophy

Three sections constitute the bulk of the study. The section on context will identify the relevant institutional and economic, cultural, and intellectual backgrounds for understanding the acts—writing, publishing, and reading—responsible for producing and interpreting the seminal texts of eighteenth century practical ethics. I investigate, for example, where and under what circumstances readers confronted these texts, how the shift from the regenting to the professorial system in Scottish universities affected moral philosophy, the interest philosophers had in celebrating the utility of their work, how the rise of polite culture shaped expectations for and interest in moral philosophy, and the extent to which some philosophical texts shared styles and goals with courtesy manuals, handbooks of Christian ethics (e.g. *The Whole Duty of Man*), sermons, and sentimental novels.

The division between the theory of morals and practical ethics organizes the next section. One chapter treats the theory of morals and its use in addressing different kinds of moral scepticism. The next chapter discusses the ways in which philosophers taxonomized our duties, virtues, and rights, explains

differences between the taxonomies, and explores how they were supposed to direct the conscience. The final chapter addresses the problem of the relation between the theory of morals and systems of practical ethics. Did the latter depend upon the former? If so, why is it that philosophers can seemingly agree on the "rules of conduct" even when they differ markedly concerning, say, in which faculty of the mind moral ideas originate or whether the will is free?

The third main section discusses the different respects in which moral philosophy purported to provide therapy. I examine different accounts of moral failing, of ethically useful knowledge, and of how philosophical writing (e.g. Hume's essays) engaged eighteenth century readers in morally desirable ways. The section's final chapter develops the idea that if philosophy can cultivate the mind, it should also have the ability to corrupt it. I study the charges leveled against Mandeville in order to identify how his countrymen thought his writing promoted "licentiousness."

I have published (Heydt 2007, 2008) and drafted (Heydt, in progress) articles that will make up the bulk of chapters 1, 4, 9, and 10. In addition, I have written portions of chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7, and will draft chapter 11 by the time the fellowship is scheduled to begin. I need a year in order to finish composing the manuscript: chapter 2 and the remainder of chapters 3, 5, and 6 in Summer and Fall 2009, chapters 8 and 12 and the remainder of chapter 7 in Spring 2010, and re-drafting and editing in order to finalize the book manuscript in Summer 2010. I believe that this would be an attractive project for Cambridge University Press (perhaps in their *Ideas in Context* series) and I will approach them first with a book proposal. The intended audience for this book would include philosophers (especially modern philosophers and ethicists) and intellectual historians.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (selections)

Allestree, Richard. 1658. *The Practice of Christian Graces, Or the Whole Duty of Man*.

Beauchamp, Tom. 2007. "History and Theory in 'Applied Ethics,'" *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 55-64.

Bentham, Jeremy. 1996 [1789]. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Edited by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Butler, Joseph. 1900. *The Works of Bishop Butler*. Edited by J. H. Bernard. 2 vols. London: Macmillan.

Carmichael, Gershom. 2002. *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edited by J. Moore and M. Silverthorne. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Darwall, Stephen. 1995. *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought: 1640-1740*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

James Downey. 1969. *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Seeker, Sterne, Whitefield, and Wesley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ferguson, Adam. 1769. *The Institutes of Moral Philosophy*. Edinburgh.

Garber, Daniel and Ayers, Michael (eds.). 1998. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, Michael B. 2006. *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Haakonssen, Knud. 1990. Introduction to Thomas Reid's *Practical Ethics*. Edited by Knud Haakonssen. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Haakonssen, Knud. 1996. *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haakonssen, Lisbeth. 1997. *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment: John Gregory, Thomas Percival and Benjamin Rush*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodolpi.

Harris, James. 2003. "Answering Bayle's Question: Religious Belief in the Moral Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol.1, 229-53.

Harris, James. 2005. *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.

Hume, David. 1985. *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Hundert, E.G. 1994. *The Enlightenment's* Fable. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutcheson, Francis. 2007 [1745]. *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*. Edited by L. Turco. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Klein, Lawrence. 1994. *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Klein, Lawrence. 2002. "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal*, 45, 4, 869-898.

Mandeville, Bernard. 1988 [1732]. *The Fable of the Bees*. Edited by F. B. Kaye. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Moore, James. 1990. "The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: On the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment" in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edited by M. A. Stewart. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Norton, David Fate. 1982. *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Paley, William. 2002 [1785]. *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Phillipson, N.T. 1983. "Adam Smith as Civic Moralist" in *Wealth and Virtue: the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edited by I. Hont and M. Ignatieff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Michael Prince. 1996. *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reid, Thomas. 1990. *Practical Ethics*, Edited by Knud Haakonssen. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rivers, Isabel. 1991, 2000. *Reason, Grace, and* Sentiment. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schneewind, J.B. 1998. *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

Shaftesbury, Third Earl of. 2001 [1711]. *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Sher, Richard B. 1985. *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sher, Richard B. 2006. *The Enlightenment and the Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Adam. 1976 [1790]. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Stewart, Dugald. 1982. "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith" in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Wood, Paul. 1993. *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

COLIN HEYDT
RESEARCH

Book:
Rethinking Mill's Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education (London: Continuum Press, 2006).

Edited Journal Issue:
Special Issue on Practical Ethics, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

Articles and Book Chapters:
"Mill, Life as Art, and Problems of Self-Description in an Industrial Age" in *John Stuart Mill and the Art of Life*, Eggleston, Miller, and Weinstein (eds)., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

"'A Delicate and an Accurate Pencil': Adam Smith, Description, and the Practical Purposes of Ethics," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Jan. 2008), 57-74.

"Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness," *Hume Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (April 2007), 3-19.

"Mill, Bentham, and 'Internal Culture'," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 2 (May 2006), 275-302.

"Narrative, Imagination, and the Religion of Humanity in Mill's Ethics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 44, no. I (Jan. 2006) 99-115.

Work in Progress:
"Practical Ethics" for inclusion in James Harris (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth Century British Philosophy* (Oxford University Press)

"Hutcheson's *Short Introduction* and the Purposes of Moral Philosophy" (under review)

"Licentious Philosophy and the Threat of Moral Corruption: Responses to Mandeville" for inclusion in special issue on practical ethics in *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012)