Andrew Sneddon
Like-Minded: Externalism and Moral Psychology.
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Like-Minded attempts to unite the extended mind hypothesis with findings from moral psychology in defence of what Sneddon calls the 'Wide Moral Systems Hypothesis' (WMSH). The 'wide' indicates that moral cognition is partly constituted by the world beyond our skull and skin. After sketching the conceptual territory in Ch. 1, Sneddon concentrates on defending the WMSH on empirical grounds. He examines findings from moral psychology as they bear on moral judgment (Ch. 2), reasoning (Ch. 3), responsibility (Ch. 4), agency (Ch. 5) and amoralism (Ch. 6), demonstrating an impressive grasp of the empirical literature throughout. He also provides interesting commentary on the work of prominent theoreticians such as Haidt, Hauser, Nichols, and Prinz. Although I doubt whether Sneddon makes his ambitious central case for the WMSH, a professional audience interested or engaged in empirically orientated moral psychology will find the book valuable.

According to the WMSH, when we think morally, we participate in wide cognitive systems. Sneddon's example of flocking birds (18–20) helps us get a handle on this idea. Say that each bird in a flock tracks the movement of its neighbours and simultaneously looks for food. Now say that the easternmost bird spots food and flies towards it, its neighbours follow, and the westernmost bird reliably finds its supper. Although the westernmost bird didn't initially know the location of the food, Sneddon argues that the bird responded to it by participating in a wide cognitive system mediated by the mental states and behaviour of its flockmates. The wide system, not the individual bird, processed the information. This interpretation is licensed, according to Sneddon, by the degree of functional and causal integration exhibited by the putative wide system.

How might we participate in a comparable wide moral system? Sneddon argues that we are doubly 'like-minded' – the book's title is a pun. We share token psychological processes and we make like moral judgments by tracking each other's mental states. Much of the book is concerned with explaining how we accomplish these tasks. Drawing widely on experimental moral psychology, and in the process providing a helpful survey of the field, Sneddon argues that we employ a grab bag of methods. Some of these are conscious, considered methods, while others are automatic. Mind-reading and emotional capacities are especially important, enabling us to calibrate our moral judgments with our peers. This much is consistent of course with conventional, narrow approaches. However, Sneddon also argues that we can literally share psychological processes. Thus, one person's mental states, such as her emotional attitudes, can form part of another person's moral judgment (mirror neurons are the proposed mechanism of transmission). Moreover, external states of affairs, including the mental states of our peers, can play a constitutive, causal role in action production. Beliefs, for instance, can be partly constituted by the states and processes that make up an individual's

participation in a wider information processing system. Some of the information-processing necessary to produce action is 'performed between the individual and the environment' (190).

Sneddon argues, then, that we typically think about moral matters in concert with others. This fits with his emphasis on the importance of social conformity to moral judgment. Given its interpersonal nature, moral judgment and reasoning requires us to read the mental states of our peers, including their emotional attitudes. However, it can also involve participating in moral reasoning systems as rational, autonomous interlocutors. This seems important if moral discourse is more about agreeing on the truth than agreeing with each other, as indeed Sneddon suggests (94). Thus, we share information, tell stories and reason together in order to form judgments, solve problems, attribute moral responsibility and figure out the shape of our shared moral environment.

Overall, Sneddon develops a heterogeneous, dis-unified account of moral cognition. Moral judgment and reasoning depend on processes that can be rational, emotional and/or instinctive, internal and/or external. Sneddon offers this as an alternative to the traditional reason *versus* emotion, Kant *versus* Hume metaethical debates. Indeed, he suggests at one stage that finding a third way is 'the primary aim' of the book (1). But although he makes a strong case that moral judgments can be formed in various ways, and although his refusal to find artificial unity in over-generalisation is appealing, the relationship between the apparent heterogeneity of moral cognition and the traditional debates he alludes to is uncertain at best. For those debates primarily concern the *content* of moral judgments, and not, in the first place, the mechanisms causally responsible for making the judgments. Very likely the two are related, but the relationship is messy and controversial. It might be, for instance, that non-rational processes produce rational moral judgments, or vice versa. At the very least Sneddon's conclusion is too quick, and it is therefore a pity that his claim to have found a third way is given such prominence in the opening paragraphs and in the blurb.

Unfortunately, overambitious claims recur in the book. As I shall discuss shortly, the central instance of this is the WMSH itself. However, Sneddon's criticism of virtue ethics is also revealing. As mentioned, Sneddon explains action production partly in terms of a person's environment, rather than wholly in terms of her internal mental states. This picture of things leads him to consider the so-called 'person-situation' debate. What are the relative contributions of personality and environment to the production of behaviour? Sneddon marshals empirical evidence, mostly well-known studies, in favour of the view that the contribution of the environment is much larger. This leads him to the view that empirical psychology might be 'virtue's demise' (163). But his prediction involves attributing to virtue ethicists the implausible view that 'the mechanisms that purportedly realize virtues and vices operate independent of the vagaries of situation' (164). This is a mischaracterisation of virtue ethics. It is not sensible to suppose that virtuous dispositions produce the same action come what may. Firstly, virtues are locally circumscribed in the sense that they are stable dispositions of thought or action, conducive to the good *in a range of environments*. Secondly, virtues are not traditionally understood as *mechanisms* operating independently of the environment, but as capacities

for practical reasoning. Because a virtuous person skilfully acts on reasons, she must be responsive to the 'vagaries' of the situation. She will note, for instance, that the same type of action can be generous in one situation and spendthrift in another. Sneddon's prediction of virtue's demise is, therefore, far too swift. (I am also not sure that Sneddon's criticisms of virtue-theoretic approaches can be reconciled with his own appeal to 'habits of thought and action' (220) as part of moral commitment and sensibility, or with his subsequent description of what it is to be charitable.)

Returning to the central theme of the book, Sneddon does persuasively make the case that we are social creatures and that aligning our thought and action with that of our peers is a fundamental part of our moral practices. It is far from clear, however, that this either requires or strongly supports the WMSH. After all, it is agreed on all sides that our thought and action, moral and otherwise, depends in crucial ways on our environment. But, if moral cognition is embedded, and depends upon environmental resources such as shared language and other minds, this hardly shows that the wider environment forms *part* of an individual's moral cognition. The fact that findings from moral psychology appear consistent with Sneddon's WMSH is somewhat suggestive, but consistency is a relatively low bar. Why, then, the radical move of (re-)classifying these 'wide' social facts as mental states? Why not, for instance, argue that narrowly realized mental states are more tightly integrated with their environments than is generally appreciated? And why constitution as opposed to causation, context, or enablement? As with the flock of birds, Sneddon appeals to replicable causal and functional integration between an agent and her environment as the hallmarks of a wide system. But, his frequent appeal to an abstract schema capturing these features (7, 20, 72, 155, 200) is insufficient either to clinch the philosophical argument or to tie the threads of his discussion together.

While the prospect of applying the extended mind hypothesis to moral psychology seems like an exciting one, *Like-Minded* fails to make a compelling case for the project. Instead, Sneddon gives us a mixture of detailed, careful discussion of empirical work and rather over-ambitious, under–developed philosophical claims. If the latter may leave some readers feeling short-changed, the former is solid, professional work (written in solid, professional prose). In particular, Sneddon helpfully sets out and synthesises empirical findings tending to support the view that moral cognition is first, foremost, and fundamentally an interpersonal process, while also making useful contributions to the theoretical debates surrounding recent findings in moral psychology. *Like-Minded* merits attention for these reasons.

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