

Moral Foundations of Philosophy of Mind

(Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Edited by

Joel Backström (University of Helsinki), *Hannes Nykänen* (University of Helsinki), *Niklas Toivakainen* (University of Helsinki), *Thomas Wallgren* (University of Helsinki)

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Introduction

Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Niklas Toivakainen and Thomas Wallgren

It is widely thought today that by bringing the study of the human mind into the orbit of objective, empirical investigation, cognitive neuroscience and evolutionary psychology have taken us to the brink of an epochal scientific breakthrough comparable to those pioneered by Galileo in early modern times and Darwin in the nineteenth century. A loud minority position holds, by contrast, that there are principled limits to the ‘naturalisation’ of the study of the mind, and that it is the task of philosophy to define and police those limits.

The contributors to this volume are critical of scientism in the philosophy of mind. Nevertheless, the book as a whole is not just one more humanistic or conservative critique of scientism, nor does it invoke the supposed authority of philosophy or ordinary language to once and for all put science in its proper place. Rather, it aims to uncover and unsettle certain key assumptions, which underlie and give shape to much of contemporary discourse on naturalism and the mind; assumptions that preclude a clear understanding of the mind by obscuring the role and significance moral issues have in our lives. The essays are not united by a common position. Rather, the unity of the book comes from a certain constellation of questions and interests that reappears, with differing emphases, in all the contributions. In their various ways, the essays investigate the relationship between the problems of mind and moral life. In many of the essays the character and aims of philosophical questioning itself are also in question. – In what follows, we will first provide a more robust description of the constellation of concerns that gives the book its unity. The contents of the individual contributions are described at the end of the Introduction.

1. A strange confusion – and a suggestion

Naturalism becomes an issue because of the felt need that philosophers since Descartes have time and again been transfixed by, namely of ‘finding a place for the mind in a world that is fundamentally and essentially physical’ (Kim 1998, pp. 4–5), or, of solving what David Chalmers and others have called ‘the hard problem of consciousness’ or, more generally, of

fitting our notions of meaning, soul and life into a universe conceived as basically mechanistic and meaningless. There is, however, no consensus on the status of the problem. Some think it has already been solved by science, others believe it will, or may, soon be solved, while yet others consider the problem real but insoluble in principle; finally, some think there never was a problem to solve, only conceptual confusion giving rise to a pseudo-problem. (For examples of these positions, see, e.g., Shear 1997). Whatever the case, in grappling with the problem philosophers have come up with wildly speculative suggestions, ranging from those who in effect deny that there is mind in nature at all and claim that we are built out of ‘mindless robots and nothing else, no non-physical, nonrobotic ingredients at all’ (Dennett 2006, p. 3), to ‘panpsychists’ who hold that nature *is* nothing but mind (cf. Skrbina 2009), with most philosophers trying to keep both ‘mind’ and ‘nature’ in play as different but somehow related aspects or realms of reality. There are also many, however, who wonder if it makes any difference whether (we say that) there is or there is not mind; thus, a favourite philosophical thought experiment concerns zombies or living dead that are, supposedly, in every respect indistinguishable from living, conscious human beings, except for the small detail that zombies experience and feel nothing at all.

Why is it that the contemporary discourse of mind gives rise to such wayward suggestions, where the very difference between life and death seems to come undone? And why are the expectations concerning this ‘last mystery of science’ so high? What are we supposed to gain if the riddle – what riddle exactly? – is solved? There are of course legitimate questions about what medical and other practical benefits we might gain from neuroscientific research. But the great excitement around the discourse of mind is not generated by them. Sometimes one gets the impression that the enthusiasm is due to a sense that we are at the brink of uncovering The Truth about the mind. Alas, it is completely unclear what this ‘truth’ is supposed to be about and what it would be like to reach it. Indeed, as we noted, there is not only no consensus about how to settle the issue; there is disagreement about whether there is any issue to be settled.

At stake, then, is not only a disagreement about how to understand a certain concept or how to interpret a given set of data but also the radical questions whether the phenomenon discussed, ‘the mind’, exists at all, and what sense, if any, we can make of the idea of a theory, or theories, of mind. We might think that we have two options: either those accepting the ‘hard problem’ have simply confabulated a story about an imaginary entity, or those who reject it deny the existence of an entity that must be of the highest importance to us. We are, after all, supposed to be discussing the very being also of our own mind, or soul, or spirit! If

the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness were solved, whatever that would mean, it would thus lead to a situation where many philosophers and scientists who have expressed opinions on the matter would turn out to have committed a simply outrageous oversight and to have fallen prey to a most serious delusion. It comes as no surprise then, that in the ongoing debates we find distinguished philosophers accusing each other of pursuing illusions or, alternatively, of overlooking the most important aspects of being human. The fervour that accompanies the disagreements in the philosophy of mind should give us pause. Nothing like it occurs in debates about merely intellectual matters. However, such nervous and troubled disagreement is typical in connection with moral and existential issues.

We suggest that progress in the debates about the philosophy of mind may not be possible as long as the ethical dimension of the problems is ignored. This dimension informs the debates and so constantly crops up between the lines, so to speak. By ‘ethics’, we do not mean an external perspective one could impose as an after-thought on a separate field of expert debate identified as ‘philosophy of mind’. Rather, we suggest that moral and theoretical questions about the mind are best seen as intertwined aspects of our understanding of human reality. The central idea of this book, then, is that the problems raised in and by the philosophy of mind are themselves, from the very beginning, articulated within a field that is morally – or ethically or existentially; no distinction is intended – charged.

2. The attractions of value freedom and technoscience

The idea that moral matters are at play at the most basic level of investigation is bound to seem strange, indeed perverse, as long as one accepts the standard notion that scientific and philosophical method demands that any object, the mind included, should be studied in a way that remains neutral with respect to any moral commitments. A main theme of this book is precisely to show the limits of this approach in philosophical discussions of the mind. As many of the essays bring out, moralistic and ideological distorting influences are pervasive in philosophy and the sciences of mind. Sometimes, such influences are open to view, as when certain views are *explicitly* declared inadmissible because of their supposedly insidious moral implications, the attitude being: ‘This idea must not be explored, because it would be too terrible if it turned out to be true’. More often, however the ideological distortions remain implicit, even as ideological commitments are in one sense loudly proclaimed. Thus, many participants in contemporary debates take pride in declaring themselves ‘hard’ naturalists,

while others stress that their own stance commits them only to a ‘soft’ or ‘liberal’ form of naturalism, and both sides make their announcements long before it is clear what either position really involves, and indeed whether any coherent position can be formulated.

If one had to choose between ‘value free’ inquiry into how things are or moralistic sermonising and ideological blinkers of this kind, perhaps value-freedom, whatever that is supposed to mean, would be the better option. But, as many essays here argue, these are not the real alternatives. Rather, the authors suggest that getting clear about what the issues are in the philosophy of mind is itself a moral task; i.e., one that demands ceaseless struggle against wishful and fearful fantasising and other forms of moral confusion. If so, the pretence to ‘value freedom’, far from solving the problem, would be a self-deceptive illusion; the confused idea of being able to set aside moral difficulties by fiat, by simply declaring that one will not take controversial positions but only speak the truth. This, we suggest, would be like presuming to guarantee the humorousness of one’s jokes by declaring that they will be funny. And in fact, as many of our essays bring out, moralistic or ideological distortions tend to proliferate most perniciously precisely where people would deny making any value judgements at all, for instance when they claim that they are merely reporting scientific findings.

Looking back, most people would agree that in the past the theorising of scientists and philosophers has not been immune to the spectres of wishful thinking and self-deception that distort and corrupt so many other practices too. On the contrary, it seems trivial to say that distorting tendencies have often entered already before theorising officially started, as it were, and have formed and deformed the whole intellectual-emotional-social background from which explicit theorising arises. As one instance of this, consider how racist and sexist prejudice shaped the theoretical agenda in philosophy, psychology and in the social and biological sciences in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries at least until WWII. Scientific progress as such does nothing to address this problem, for while we may now see that racist and sexist science was indeed bad *science*, at the time it was generally seen as wholly respectable, even cutting edge work. The equality of the sexes and races was not, and could not have been, a *scientific* discovery; rather, *moral* misconceptions concerning sex and race produced a plethora of fraudulent justifications and evasions dressed up as science. The distorting influence of sexism and racism on science in that time is easy for us to see because we do not share, at least not officially, precisely those prejudices. Surely no one wants to claim that today we have completely freed ourselves of all prejudice. Is it not strange that we would all admit this, and yet pay so little attention to the moral prejudices that, as we may

suspect, we are susceptible to now? One objective of this book is to advance self-reflection on these lines.

In investigating this kind of question, some of the essays focus on how philosophical and scientific theorising of the mind only gets going on the basis of more or less inchoate and unacknowledged pictures of the ‘mind’, which is delimited as an object of study in the first place through these very pictures. The very labelling of the ‘object’ of investigation is not a neutral issue; thus, to speak of the ‘mind’, or of ‘consciousness’, tends to push the investigation in rather different directions than speaking of the soul, or of being human. We speak of ‘soul music’ but ‘mind music’ or, for that matter, ‘brain music’ would have rather different connotations. In other cases the implications of the choice of words are more directly of practical consequence. Taking a pill will be of no help if you fear losing your soul, while it might perhaps help someone who is not in their right mind. Similarly, speaking of a ‘science of the soul’ engenders a tension, a sense of paradox and absurdity, which easily gets lost when we talk of ‘sciences of the mind’ or a ‘science of consciousness’ – but which we perhaps ought not to lose.

What is the exact philosophical import of the fact that the very words we use, with their associations, affect the quality of our attention, that they have the power to incline our investigations in particular directions, and so have substantial consequences? And what kind of fact is it? One suggestion is that when philosophical conceptualisations are tied to fantasies of a morally problematic kind the fantasies are typically collective fantasies of a cultural-ideological nature, part of the ‘spirit of the times’.

Consider the picture of the mind as a computer, so pervasive in recent popular debate as well as in academic contributions to the philosophy of mind. The felt self-evidence of the comparison is connected to the mythologies of our scientific and scientific culture, where technology-based ‘progress’ is seen as a natural and legitimate social goal. The attraction of this cultural formation lies, arguably, not only in what technology allows us to do, but also in the way a focus on the amazing things we can do with the aid of new technologies – measure, predict, manipulate, organise, design – allows us to shove aside questions of a political, moral and existential kind, as though everything could be turned into a technical problem, into something *doable*. Five hundred years ago many people might have found it natural to say that God or the wind speaks to them but few people would have said that the abacus they used for calculating transactions at the market place counts or thinks. Today it is common parlance to say that computers calculate and we may ask what else computers can do, but to ask whether they suffer, or long for their user to return, or feel pangs of bad conscience, seems

nonsensical. One suspicion here is that the computer is such a tempting metaphor for the mind *because*, not despite the fact that, it excludes or neutralises the moral weight that questions about mind, suffering, belonging, loss and attachment otherwise have. And when this suspicion is acknowledged, perhaps we should also look back critically at the notion that computers calculate, process algorithms, store data, *do* anything at all.

It might be objected that as computers and robots get more sophisticated, the question whether they have emotional and moral life does arise; think of films like Spike Jonze's *Her* and of how people speak about and care for robots.¹ That suggestion raises deep questions about what it means to have an emotional and moral life at all. The confidence that the future might well (and many would say: will certainly) see computers with moral and emotional lives merely expresses – but does nothing at all to prove the truth or even the coherence of – the instinctive cultural conviction that a skilled engineer can in principle build anything: feelings and morality no less than microscopes and satellites. Although the amazing advances of science and technology may seem to authorise this view, they do not do so. One open issue is the intelligibility of the idea that emotional and moral life is the kind of thing that technology could even try to produce. Many today would say that we know how to produce robotic simulations of emotional and moral responses that human beings relate to as if they were, say, the voice of a person expressing concern. Must we therefore also say that we are really robots and that robots really feel concern for us? How is this and other similar questions about new technologies related to the fact that one might be frightened by a doll with an angry face that one mistook for a human being? If we did not in older times take that fact about our reaction to dolls to show that we are really only dolls or that dolls can be angry, what follows from discussions today about computers and robots? – The questions are real. One suggestion is that philosophers and scientists might profitably study the dynamics of need, longing for and fear of intimacy, projection and so on that make various simulations of human contact so attractive to us, from children's dolls and virtual reality games up to the fascination philosophers show with the computer-metaphor of the mind. But then, precisely the difficulties that much of contemporary philosophy of mind has seemed determined to avoid would move into focus.

Returning to the main discussion, our suggestion is not that, in studying the mind, one 'must' make certain moral 'value commitments'. The point is rather that the reality one is trying to understand is itself always already morally articulated in a way that forms the background of intelligibility for any commitments one may or may not make. This is not to suggest that we should go back to some pre-modern idea of a teleologically structured 'moral

world order', a 'great chain of being' in which everything has its 'proper, natural, place'. Putting it that way represents our relation to the ethical in a falsely external and intellectual light; as though some ideological 'grand narrative' or 'world-view' were needed for us to keep, or get, our mattering to each other into view. We need, rather, to reflect on the contested understanding which, whether acknowledged or not, is revealed and perhaps transformed in our discourse of the mind or the soul, both in everyday life and in philosophy. Furthermore, we suggest that such reflection may reveal that the intertwining of the moral with what at first sight might seem morally neutral turns out to be ineliminable and deep.

As should be obvious, the characterisation 'moral' we have been using is not to be taken in any narrowly moralistic sense, having to do with particular ideals or norms of conduct. The moral dimension we are pointing to is rather concerned with how we matter to each other, as manifested in our inter-personal responses, in the good and evil to which we are alive, when we are warmed by another's smile, or chilled by the callousness in their voice, or sickened by the cruelty visited on them, and in other cases. But just as important are the difficulties we have with, as it were, accepting that others matter in the seemingly inescapable and overwhelming way they do; a difficulty that may be expressed for instance in one's hardening oneself in callousness, or ecstatically giving oneself over to cruelty. Furthermore, the moral problematic is not limited to the private sphere of intimate relations; on the contrary, as our brief remarks on collective fantasies indicated, it forms and deforms cultural, social and political life too. – In any case, the suggestion under discussion cannot be understood by taking any current conceptualisation of the moral as given, and then applying it to the questions of mind. Rather, seeing the way we speak about mind as a morally charged and contested terrain unsettles standard conceptions of 'morality' no less than of 'mindedness'. For instance, the debate over whether 'it', morality, is hard-wired into our brains by evolution, as many now claim, or is rather a result of enculturation, will lose much of its charm insofar as we suspect that both sides operate with a misguided notion of what 'it' is.

3. The moral life of the mind

In modern and contemporary philosophy of mind, the defining philosophical question has been taken to be how the mind (in the singular) relates to the world and how this mind is related to the brain in which it is taken to 'arise'; one asks how the mind's mental states get their world-directed 'content', how consciousness and 'qualia' arise in the brain, and so on. The possibility that a human mind might be a mind only in relation to other minds is typically

not considered. In the fairly recent *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, for example, only one of the 45 essays (Avramides 2009), is devoted to discussing the relations between minds, and then only in the form of the so-called problem of other minds. Ethics is, unsurprisingly, not even mentioned. There is, of course, lively contemporary interest in the abilities supposedly enabling one mind to ‘read’ others based on the ‘information’ gleaned from observing their bodily movements. However, these theorisations take for granted precisely the idea that ‘the’ mind (singular) stands over against external ‘objects’, including the bodies of others which it infers ‘house’ minds roughly like itself. By contrast, one suggestion of this book is that the relation to others is not a result of some inferential, simulating or other activity performed by an independently constituted individual mind, but is rather itself part of what it is to have a mind.

Readers versed in contemporary analytical philosophy may get the impression that our suggestion is old news by now, given the ‘E-turn’ in the philosophy of mind, with its critique of the overemphasis on the mind-brain problematic and its amenability to ‘intersubjective’ perspectives (see, e.g. Coliva *et al* 2015; Hutto and Myin 2012, Menary 2010, Newen *et al* 2018). We will explain why we do not share this assessment in endnote 3. Let us now try to make the suggestion that a relation to others is constitutive of the mind more concrete by considering the notion of *having something to say*. Our thoughts, and so our minds, are centrally articulated and expressed through our words. Moreover, a crucial part of regarding others as having a human mind is regarding them as having something to say. For instance, one might ask for their testimony, for their response to things, for what they think and how they feel, or for their word (‘So you *will* come?’). If you said of someone: ‘She has a mind, all right, she just never has anything to say’, you would probably mean that the person is so unthinkingly conventional, or so cowed and terrified of expressing any thought of their own, that there is no point in talking to them, you get no real response. They have a mind, but out of fear or complacency they refuse to use it. A dog, by contrast, does not have a mind in precisely this sense. It does not face the same tasks that humans face of using and developing their mind; of finding their voice, speaking their mind.

This task – one’s responsibility for what one thinks and how one responds – is not imposed on one somehow from without, but part of what it means to have a mind at all. This means, conversely, that having a mind is not a simply given condition but, precisely, an inescapable and never-ending task. We may fail the task by behaving in more or less irresponsible, mindless ways. Then the meaning of our words gets perverted. Think, for instance, of the manipulative attitude to language found in the world of advertising, in

political demagoguery, in intimate relations and other contexts – which might, alas, come to characterise a person’s general attitude to their words. Where this happens, the problem is that this person abandons herself to irresponsible manipulation. If it was literally true that she did not care at all, that she had no conception of being in any way answerable for what she says, the words she utters would not be her words at all and would express no thoughts.

The very idea of expressing a genuine thought or judgement – or, for that matter, a genuine feeling – seems to be morally determined or inflected, then, insofar as such expression implies a sense of answerability to the other and to oneself to get the expression right; a sense that it matters that one gets it right. This answerability is not simply one of ‘thought to the world’ or ‘word to object’; that answerability – which philosophers have tended to focus on and have indeed often seemed obsessed by to the exclusion of everything else – is certainly important, but, arguably, it makes sense only as an aspect of its mattering that, and how, you answer the other(s), and that they answer you. How such answerability is more particularly to be understood – including whether ‘answerability’ might in some respects be a misleading word to use here – is a large question; our suggestion is simply that it is the kind of question philosophers of mind should be asking. When we turn to it, we may find that how one goes on to articulate this dimension of answerability more precisely is itself both a philosophical and a moral matter, one through the other. Many of the essays in this book elaborate this notion, as have, in their different ways, many philosophers before, from Socrates to Hegel and Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Buber and Levinas – philosophers whose work tends, perhaps not coincidentally, to be largely overlooked in contemporary philosophy of mind.² Pointing to the fundamental role of answerability is not the end of the matter, but only the beginning. Words are spoken within *a relationship between interlocutors* which can, many of the essays suggest, only be described and understood in a moral vocabulary, using concepts such as openness, concern, trust, truthfulness, responsibility, betrayal, shame, embarrassment, and so on. The life of the mind, to use that expression, involves not only our longing to express ourselves and make ourselves known to each other, but also the difficulties we have in doing so, as when we find it difficult even to *try*, out of a fear of being misunderstood – but perhaps also of actually being understood, of standing revealed, as it were naked, before the other.³

It is important to underline precisely the difficulties we have with daring to address others openly and to answer their address. Answerability is not just a fact; it is a persistent problem, a terrifying prospect. In general, seeing morality as basic in the way many of the essays suggest, does not mean painting a rosy picture of human goodness, or erecting some

lofty ideal. Our moral responsibility is something we would often wish to get rid of. In the spirit of this insight, some of the essays explicate the notion that the moral attraction of naturalism – that is, what people find tempting in it – is due precisely to its declared ‘amoralism’. This might be found tempting insofar as there is a desire to externalize one’s responsibility. For instance, the idea that evolutionary psychologists can explain our inclination towards violence and lust for power can easily – and conveniently – obscure the question of how it is that we ourselves, in actual moments of life, stand in relationship to the other against whom we might turn violent or oppressive.

Of course, such self-deceptive externalisation of responsibility can take many other forms as well, along lines of social constructivism, psychodynamics, class analysis, discourse analysis and so on. Here, as so often in philosophy, perspectives that present themselves as diametrically opposed turn out to share the most important starting-point and to fulfil the same problematic function in the moral economy of our thinking. Moreover, the avoidance of moral clarity is clearly not something that only or primarily happens in philosophical or scientific theorising. The everyday relations between ethnic groups, classes, or the sexes, for instance, are replete with ideas, more or less inchoate or explicit, instinctive or worked out, about the ‘nature’ of people from different groups, and about the limitations and necessities that these supposed natures impose on the relations between them. Women *cannot* do this or men *always* do that; men cannot understand women because they behave like that, and so on. Thus, the question of, and the responsibility for, how I and you, these particular persons, are to relate to each other, is as it were taken out of our hands; instead of being something we are answerable for, our range of possibilities come to seem determined for us externally, by the ‘natures’ of ‘men’ and ‘women’.

The general point is that one root of our moral difficulties is our tendency to misrepresent our involvement in life and the responsibility that comes with it. An important implication is that claims about evolutionary design or socio-cultural construction of the mind as well as the conceptual distinctions and charts that guide us in any discourse of the mind need to be subjected to philosophical reflection in order to clarify, for instance, to what extent they involve moral externalization that may be tempting and hence difficult to acknowledge.

4. Mind, nature and the nature of ethics

Most philosophers today understand themselves as naturalists of one kind or other. Yet there is little reflection on the philosophical meaning and investment of the concepts of the ‘natural’

and of ‘naturalism’. Why is it important to claim, or deny – what is one speaking for or guarding against in claiming (or denying) – that conceptual capacities or the moral life, say, are ‘natural’? We suggest that until there is serious reflection on this question, declarations *pro* or *contra* naturalism and debates over whether this or that phenomenon can be ‘naturalised’, or again, whether naturalism should be of a ‘harder’ or ‘softer’ variety, will tend to produce confusion rather than clarity.

If moral questions are, as the essays in this book in various ways suggest, inseparable from questions concerning the mind, the way we struggle with the former will inevitably influence the way we conceive of the latter. Insofar as this is the case there is no way to sidestep the internal relationship between the mind and morality in order to investigate the mind in a morally neutral way, and the concepts of ‘facts’ or ‘nature’ cannot offer such a route either. The wildly divergent ideas about the mind reflect wildly divergent ideas about morality, and if the concept of ‘nature’ is introduced into this problematic, it too will be drawn into this morally charged field. Moreover, ‘nature’ being one of the most mythologically loaded concepts not only in the Western cultural tradition,⁴ some conceptions of nature may themselves covertly contribute to this moral charge.

In underlining the inescapable role of moral attention the essays in this book do not only raise doubts about reductively empirical conceptions of the human mind; they also question the more general philosophical tendency to misconstrue and marginalise the role of ethics. Thus, while one may rightly point out different problems with a reductive naturalism, for instance by showing the richness and contested nature of the concept of nature, which contrasts with the often thoughtless and narrow notion of the ‘natural’ employed by hard naturalists, one must be alert so that, in doing this, one does not smuggle in unexamined ideas about ethics; ideas perhaps driven by an unacknowledged wish to reduce the ‘disturbing’ aspects of moral life to a more ‘manageable’ level. On this issue, as on others, there is some difference of opinion between the authors of the present volume. Some of the essays are sympathetic to the idea of soft naturalism while others regard this notion as no less problematic than the notion of hard naturalism to which it presents itself as an alternative. But whatever differences of view the contributors to this volume may have here, they question the idea that some morally neutral conception of nature could be used to set investigations of the mind on a morally unbiased and in this sense ‘scientific’ ground.

To illustrate the point, consider the difficulties involved in giving a good account of *love*, difficulties that arise whether the account purports to be scientific, naturalistic or something else. Love is something we struggle with, something we long for, something we

are afraid of, something we try to open up ourselves to, something we fear losing, something we fake in order to get something we want, something we sentimentalise, something we dramatise, something we deceive ourselves about, etc. But how should we understand this significance of love? How can we account for it? Attraction, self-concern, security, lust, desire for being affirmed as a person, bodily inclination, a transcendental orientation to goodness – there are many candidates for our attention. Whatever we want to think about these, the issues we are dealing with are also moral. Arguably, to learn to understand them better is not something that can be done as a merely intellectual project but is rather a life-long task. The idea of a purely scientific investigation of the mind is then, we suggest, as unthinkable as a purely scientific investigation of ethics and love.

All this obviously goes for the objects of neurological study, too. What is a neutral science to make of the brain-scan images of a brutal and insensitive person who, calling her inclination ‘love’, is inclined to dominate everyone in her proximity? What would it mean if scientists claimed that they can by means of neutral scientific methods read off the hypocrisy or shallowness of understanding of their experimental subject, let alone the truthfulness of their *own* understanding of the phenomenon they presume to investigate, from their data? This is not to say that data collected by neuroscientists or evolutionary psychologists are useless. What we want to underline is that there is, in cases like this, an intrinsic relation between what we take to be data about factual matters and how we understand ethics and love. It is because the scientist can make distinctions in what she sees that she can make use of her data. She may for instance be interested in the phenomenon that a subject’s relation to a third person seems to be characterised more by a wish to be loved by the other than by love of that person. There is a whole world of possible specifications and complications in connection to love and it is her understanding of these things that makes it possible for the scientist to make distinctions that can guide her empirical work. But understanding such things about love and ethics is not itself an instance of scientific understanding. One aim of the essays in this book is to show the importance of this theme and to shed light on different aspects of it.⁵

Some critics of hard naturalism suggest that the source of our conceptual confusions in the philosophy of mind, in philosophising about love, and elsewhere lies in the very structure of our language, the reason for our bewilderment being that, as Wittgenstein suggested, we lack a ‘perspicuous representation’ of the ‘uses of our words’ (1988, §122). On this philosophical self-understanding, the main task of philosophy is conceptual analysis in the form of the study of the uses of words found in different language games. Moreover, on this view philosophy must insist, in direct opposition to hard naturalism, on a strict differentiation

between conceptual and empirical (and more generally experiential) questions. While many of the essays in the present volume could be characterised as, among other things, Wittgensteinian in inspiration, they suggest a somewhat different understanding. The overall suggestion is that our conceptual confusions regarding ‘love’, for instance, are directly connected with the (moral) difficulty of loving – or, to put it even more strongly, that our conceptual confusions regarding ‘love’ *are* our confusions regarding all that loving implies. While reflection on such confusions can certainly be characterised as a conceptual intervention, achieving clarity is not a business of merely analysing uses of words. Rather, it is, to use another phrase from Wittgenstein, a ‘work on oneself’ (1999, p. 161). Moreover, such working on oneself is not an egocentric business but is concerned with how one understands and relates to other people, and how one sees oneself in these respects.

In other words, the business of looking at ordinary language with understanding is fraught with the same problems as looking at a brain-scans with understanding. The effort to become clear about the sense of our language is inseparable from efforts to come to grips with the moral dynamics of our norms and conventions. Our concepts thus have a certain openness to them and in philosophical work we are constantly challenged not only to clarify what rules and criteria determine our concepts – as if we were observing language from the outside, detached from our own person and our moral difficulties – but also to clarify in what particular ways *we* may be confused and what meaning we are able and willing to assign to our words. Returning to our earlier example, it is not that we first learn (intellectually, referentially, behaviourally) what ‘love’ is/means (the ‘rules’ that determine the correct use) and are only then able to love (and hate). Rather we learn the meaning of love – not once and for all, but all through life – by exploring and searching for how deeply, truthfully, relentlessly, openly etc. we are able to love and what inclinations and aspirations that seek to tame, restrict, control, pervert, or distort love. Such morally involved conceptual investigation is not empirical in the scientific or hard naturalist sense, but neither is it ‘merely conceptual’. What we are dealing with here are our very lives, how we understand them and how we wish and hope to live.

The confusions we may find inherent in our ordinary conceptions of ourselves and others are not ‘errors’ in the sense that Paul Churchland and other hard naturalists claim to have in mind when they suggest that our conceptual self-understanding is to be corrected with the help of neuro- and other empirical sciences (e.g. Churchland 1995, p. 206). Unless the champions of neuroscience pay attention to the moral dynamics of our concepts, including their possible repressive, morally falsifying aspects, they are likely to simply produce new

forms of illusions and misconceptions; illusions and misconceptions that may be unusually damaging because part of the illusion consists in the belief that these views are underpinned by neutral, scientific truth. On the other hand, if the moral problematic is taken seriously, this may open fruitful new avenues for the neurosciences too.

5. Farewell to the philosophy of mind?

One more way in which the essays of the present volume contribute a radical challenge to the contemporary discourse in the philosophy and the sciences of mind needs to be foregrounded here; namely, their questioning of the conception of philosophy as a theoretical endeavour that can be divided into different sub-disciplines with their own subject matters and specialists.

One source of the standard conception may be the notion that there are ontological categories that can serve as a guide to the division of labour in philosophy. Thus, much of the contemporary discourse on mind seems to presuppose that ‘mind’ can be seen as a natural kind, or as a ready-made category of things or phenomena. But does that make sense? If we look for an example of what we *can* mean when we speak of natural kinds, the brain is a good candidate. In studies of the brain there may be disputes about where the brain begins and some other part of the nervous system ends or what tissue inside the skull belongs or does not belong to the brain. But these considerations will not obscure what we mean when we talk about the brain, they will normally not involve questions of the form; when you study this, are you sure that it is the *brain* you study? Clearly, ‘the mind’ is not in any similar sense a natural kind and conceptually legitimate as such – as the wild disagreements among philosophers of mind that we remarked on at the beginning of this Introduction strikingly illustrates. This notwithstanding, during the past decades we have got rather used to accepting the concepts of ‘mind’ and ‘philosophy of mind’ as powerful classificatory devices to guide our investigations. Typically today, once we accept ‘philosophy of mind’ as a legitimate concept, we will also accept that at least the following phenomena: sensations, perceptions, experiences, feelings, intentions, desires, emotions, memories, volitions and thoughts, have the important common characteristic that they are all ‘of’ or ‘in’ the mind. Whatever we take that assumption to mean and imply, and no matter how seriously we subscribe to it, the consequence is that we accept some idea of unity and that we will therefore easily be willing to look for underlying similarities between the phenomena just listed. Our classificatory approach invites us to invent ways of justifying the scheme; ways of explaining what is

common to the ‘mind-objects’ that we have first decided to group together, no matter how artificially or thoughtlessly. We may look, for instance, for the areas in the brain where particular mind-objects are ‘processed’ or where particular powers or functions of the mind are located. – We have invented a new conceptual hammer, the hammer of ‘the mind’, and we see mind-nails everywhere. – But it is, we propose, an open question and a question of some urgency, to take stock of how much of this new hammering we need and what the ubiquitous mind-hammering of all the mind-nails, arguably very different between them, does to our understanding and hence, to us.

The purpose of the remarks just made is neither to object to, nor to agree with, the elevation of ‘mind’ into its current, central role in the classificatory hierarchy of philosophy. Rather, and to repeat, we wish to question the very idea of philosophy as a theoretical endeavour that can be divided according to subject matters with a set order, and conducted in a way where theoretical rigour has no need for moral judgement. In suggesting that the concepts now included in the ‘mind’-family are intrinsically moral, i.e. that their analysis has a moral dimension, we are not proposing a contrast between concepts that are intrinsically moral and others that are not. Our point about the relation between philosophy and morality is perfectly general, in the following way. The understanding we have of our words guides our lives. Hence, when a concept is problematic, when we have problems with what our words mean, these are problems about how to live. Thus, the difficulty of understanding our concepts is internally related to the difficulties we have of making sense of our life together, and to analyse a concept – pain, for instance – is a matter of trying to understand what pain means, that is, the ways in which we react and respond to others in pain, and to our own pain. And this connects, among other things, to questions of compassion, cruelty, and worry about pain in case for instance of a child's fear of the dentist or possible over-use of pain-killers in terminal care. If the analysis loses its connection to, and its power to illuminate, our multifarious trouble with pain and responses to pain, there will no longer be any limit to what we may claim in our analysis and hence, no way to determine whether what we provide is an analysis of pain, or of something else, or of nothing at all.

Are our difficulties with pain, or with the analysis of the concept pain, or generally with the kinds of questions taken to touch on issues relevant to the philosophy of mind, always only moral problems? This is not our claim. Our point is rather that we cannot start our inquiry with the presumption that we *know* how to delimit ‘the moral’, and could thus declare what is and is not a moral problem; the task is precisely to become clear about the way conceptual and moral issues are intertwined, for instance, the ways in which we self-

deceptively avoid and misrepresent the character of our involvement in situations and relationships. In this kind of investigation, ‘the mind’ and ‘moral life’ are not separable by decree.

6. The ‘unity’ and structure of the volume

We have emphasised certain general outlooks on philosophy of mind, and philosophy in general, that are shared by the contributors to this volume. However, some readers might still think that it is unclear what constitutes the ‘unity’ of the volume; what views the contributors agree about and try to promote. It seems important to say a few words about this question.

It is not clear how the concept of unity should be understood with respect to a philosophical anthology. Unity could be taken to mean that the contributors largely share a given basic philosophical outlook or, if not that, at least that they address a theme that they all see as distinct enough to be addressed. In the former case one dissident who rejects the whole problem is often included in order to lessen, in the name of scientific rigour, the impression of doctrinal consensus. But if doctrinal consensus is problematic, one could also ask how a common theme could unify approaches if they have completely different ideas about how the issues should be investigated. What is the unity between, say, an empirically based psychological view on emotions and rationality and a Kantian account of the same subject? Since both would insist on the importance of the method employed, it is hard to see how the subject could confer unity to their contributions.

One could say that what unites the authors of the present volume is not anything of the kind mentioned above, but rather a shared concern that moral life has not been given due attention in philosophy in general and in philosophy of mind in particular. Is what they seek the good old ‘eternal truth’? Again, the authors would probably have different things to say about this, but most of them would be likely to reject the suggestion that the choice is between a metaphysical idea about truth and a postmodern or neopragmatist ‘modest’ and historically relative truth. All of the essays point in their different ways to the serious limitations of construing problems concerning the human mind as merely rational puzzles, but they do so not by appealing to a ‘human perspective’, to particular moral ideas or, in general, to something like ‘soft values’. Instead, they appeal to a form of understanding that is not in any ordinary sense rational – nor of course irrational – but must rather be conceived of in terms of the way human beings understand each other morally.

Seeing connections and differences is a central, philosophical task – not something that can be established in advance as a matter of fact. Thus, what emerges from the present anthology will partly be a result of the different ways in which its readers approach the connections developed by the authors. Nevertheless, the philosophical connections that are elaborated in the book spring from the shared concern that without bringing in moral philosophy into the centre court of philosophy we will not be able to formulate philosophical problems concerning the mind (nor any other ones) in a way that makes contact with what really troubles us in them.

The book is divided into three sections; a division that is, as such divisions are bound to be, partly arbitrary. The first section, *Questioning philosophy of mind*, starts with a chapter by **Thomas Wallgren**, who subjects the philosophical self-understanding of some contemporary classics of philosophy of mind – Jaegwon Kim, John McDowell, John Searle, Daniel Dennett and Peter Hacker – to immanent criticism, and finds that their apparently diverse and mutually opposing contributions all end in embarrassment on their own terms. In particular, ‘a pained dialectic between proud commitment to reason and despondent abandonment of reason emerges’. Wallgren locates the source of this predicament in a failure to acknowledge how issues seen as ‘internal and central to the philosophy of mind, are intrinsically linked to controversial aspects of our moral and political self-understanding’. He goes on to suggest that progress in the philosophy of mind may be achieved through a sceptical reconsideration of what progress in this area may be like. **Federico Leoni**, taking a longer historical perspective – from Nicholas of Cusa, over Karl Jaspers to today – diagnoses the ‘subject’ today called ‘philosophy of mind’ as having been ridden by a strange paradox from the start, in that precisely ‘that thing’ which, supposedly, constitutes the very essence of the human soul, seems to escape the philosophical and, later, psychiatric discourse. When the life of the soul is ‘captured’ in these discourses, the life, the ‘soul’ that was the very object of scrutiny, has vanished.

In the contributions in the second section, *Ethical critiques of reductive naturalism*, this same paradox – that the soul eludes representation, so to speak – shows itself again and again from different angles. Thus, **Phil Hutchinson** shows how contemporary forms of enactivism or 4E cognition, in their avowed efforts to escape, through an appropriation of Gibson’s influential theory of affordances, the problem that arises with every form of representation, nonetheless fail – just like the representationalists they criticise – to solve the problem of ‘capturing’ the life of the mind, and specifically ‘the central role of normativity and evaluation in our responsiveness to loci of significance in the lifeworld’. The same

problem is seen from an even more pointedly moral perspective in the chapters by **David Cerbone** and **Edmund Dain**. Starting out from the Wittgensteinian notion of ‘an attitude towards a soul’, they in their different ways – Cerbone largely through a critical discussion of Dennett’s ‘heterophenomenology’, Dain through questioning the intelligibility of ‘the problem of other minds’ – show how the tendency to leave out the moral perspective when accounting for the human mind will in fact depict human beings in a way where they are no longer recognisable as human.

Taking up the question of psychological self-ascription, **Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen** shows that such ascriptions cannot be understood in terms of ‘the standard model of observation and descriptions’, since they are always (also) ‘ways of situating ourselves morally in relations to others’. A different aspect of this moral dimension of speaking – to others, or of and to oneself, in thought – is discussed by **Camilla Kronqvist**, who questions the way philosophy and science approach the concept of love. By contrasting their objectivising language with poetic language, she shows how philosophy and science, in their attempt to remain neutral and to bypass ‘the existential dimensions and moral difficulties [that] are there to be seen in the significance that different people are prepared to assign to different uses of “love”’, lose sight of what it is about love that is of such crucial importance to us, and so fail to *speak to us*.

The chapters in the final section of the book, *The second person and the hidden moral dynamics of philosophy*, focus on two intertwined themes that these contributions suggest form the background to the problems identified in earlier chapters. In different ways, they argue that a major source of philosophical problems is that philosophy has tended to choose a first/third-personal, subjectivising/objectivising perspective over the second-personal I-you-perspective constitutive of interpersonal understanding. Secondly, they try to show that this very tendency, and the paradoxes and difficulties of understanding that it spawns (canvassed throughout this book), can be seen as symptoms of unacknowledged moral-existential difficulties arising in, and concerning, precisely the I-you-relationship.

Joel Backström shows the impossibility of conceiving our understanding of others inferentially, and more generally epistemically (with a subject relating to an object of knowledge). Our understanding of others and ourselves is immediate and engaged in a way which we cannot eliminate but can – and in our life together constantly do – try to repress, because of the challenges it brings. Philosophy’s way of conceptualising ‘the mind’ as split from the body and from other minds is, Backström suggests, one instance of this very repression. Similarly, **Niklas Toivakainen** argues that the idea that minds are in some

fundamental sense invisible and inaccessible to each other is, in strictly intellectual terms, nonsensical, but has great force as an essentially ambivalent *fantasy* – one that, he shows, underpins both naturalist philosophy of mind and Lacan’s theory of the subject – where open contact with the other is simultaneously longed for and fearfully defended against. Toivakainen connects this ambivalence with a basic conflict in our life between love and narcissism.

Picking up from this, **Fredrik Westerlund** points out that the idea, generally taken for granted in philosophy of mind, that it is hard or even impossible to know another’s mind or be known by them, assumes that we would *want* to be known – but this precisely is *not* the case in any unqualified sense. Rather, we want to be seen as we would *wish* to be (seen), given our narcissistic urge for social affirmation – as distinct from our longing for love’s truthful openness. The basic problem is not intellectual, but, moral: a fear and refusal to know/be known. **Hannes Nykänen** radicalises this thought in his contention that philosophical reasoning point by point follows the same logic as that of a person who denies her conscience and defends her evil acting, that is, who refuses to be in understanding with the other; hence, the ‘problem’ of other minds is analogous to, and homologous with, a moral problem where openness with the other is unbearable.

In the final chapter, **Rupert Read** explores a ‘relational ethics’. While affirming the second-personal view of the mind and the diagnosis of the subject/object-perspective as the basic problem, he wishes to broaden this perspective to include relations between collectives of humans and living beings generally from what, in critical dialogue with Wittgenstein, Løgstrup, Levinas and three contributions to the present volume, he argues is too narrow a focus on the singular I-you-relation.

Thus, the book ends on a note of apparent agreement *and* disagreement, and one could find many other points of such disagreement-in-agreement among its contributors. This state of things should neither be lamented nor blandly accepted, but vigorously explored. In general, we conceive the book’s contribution to the philosophy of mind to lie in opening up a new kind of question, rather than settling for a new answer.⁶

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- ¹ Sherry Turkle (2011) provides a wealth of interesting examples of how computers and robots enter and shape everyday life and the ways we talk.
- ² There are, of course, exceptions to this neglect, some of which explicitly address the question which the present book seeks to give more sustained attention, of the intermeshing of the human mind or soul – and its philosophical treatment – with the ethical. The Hegel-inspired work of Charles Taylor (1985) and the Wittgenstein-inspired work of Stanley Cavell (1999) are notable examples; the Wittgenstein-inspired writings of, for example, Cockburn (1990), Dilman (2005), and Overgaard (2007), should also be mentioned. By contrast, in a recent edited collection devoted to *Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Mind* (Ellis & Guevara, 2012), the ethical is conspicuous by its absence.
- ³ There is a growing literature across various fields (philosophy, cognitive science, developmental psychology) and traditions arguing for an intersubjective or ‘second-personal’ perspective on the mind. However, while these contributions, many of which can be classed as part of the ‘E-turn’ in philosophy of mind, are often interesting in other respects, they tend to assume the kind of morally disengaged framework that the present volume calls into question, approaching the issues either in a morally (apparently) neutral way – for example, Foolen et al. (2012), Satne and Roepstorff (2015), Szanto and Moran (2016), Thompson (2001), Zlatev Racine, Sinha, and Itkonen (2008) – or else giving a far too restricted moral significance to the I-you perspective and other aspects of the moral dynamics in the field (e.g., Darwall, 2009). Tellingly, the recent 900-page *Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition* (Newen et al., 2018) includes just one page on ‘moral normativity’, and one on ‘the ethical dimension of intersubjectivity’; for the rest, there appears to be no explicit thematisation of the ethical, or of the way in which the moral charge of discourses on the mind may problematise the supposed ‘neutrality’ of the philosopher/scientist studying it, as we have suggested. The latter lacuna also shows in the growing literature explicitly coupling investigations of the mind/brain and of morality – for example, Doris and The Moral Psychology Research Group (2010), Liao (2016), Sinnott-Armstrong (2008) – which tends to assume that (supposedly) morally neutral research on the mind in neuroscience and related disciplines has implications for our understanding of morality. By contrast, we principally urge reflection in the opposite direction, as it were, on the unacknowledged ethical presuppositions driving, and the difficulties with moral understanding hampering theories and research in philosophy and in the sciences of mind. In contemporary debates, ethics may be brought into the discussion for various reasons: because human thought is supposed to intervene in the events of the quantum-physical world (e.g., Stapp, 2015); because ethics is thought to place limits to research, or because it is assumed to enter more loosely as a ‘human world of experience’ not completely accessible to ‘hard’ science. Sometimes, ethics is brought in only to be squeezed into the standard mill of scientific rationality (e.g., Churchland, 2015); sometimes, it is addressed on the basis of a standard set of assumptions and methods derived from philosophical logic, grammar or phenomenology. What is not acknowledged in these approaches is how moral issues are intrinsic to the discourse of mind and how attention to this dimension of the discourse transforms our understanding of both the method and object of study.
- ⁴ Kant reminds us of this when he writes: ‘Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or any thought more sublimely expressed, than in the inscription over the Temple of *Isis* (Mother *Nature*): “I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and my veil no mortal has removed”’ (Kant 2000, p. 194).
- ⁵ The same problem arises, ironically enough, in philosophical ethics itself, where moral questions are regularly discussed as though they were logical or intellectual problems – i.e., as though our relationship to them was basically the same as towards such problems.
- ⁶ We are grateful to the Academy of Finland for supporting the research project that has made this volume possible.