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1

Contemporary Pragmatism

1.1. The siren call of moral imagination

In my introduction, I suggested that the idea to connect imagination with morality is not trivial and has generally met resistance in the history of philosophy, but has become more influential today. What can explain this success? I can think of at least the following reasons.

First, the vocabulary of moral imagination appears to be an attractive alternative or addition to contemporary views of moral deliberation that focus on an agent's will, desires, principles, and reasons.¹ Such views seem incomplete and inadequate since they tend to portray moral deliberation as being separated from others, rely on capacities that seem separated from other personal capacities such as feeling and imagination, and their dry² and abstract vocabulary appears hopelessly alienated from concrete practices and people's own understanding of these practices. The concept of moral imagination, proposed by pragmatists (for example Johnson 1993, Fesmire 2003), moral sentiment theorists (for example Nussbaum 2001), and others (for example Murdoch) remedies these handicaps. By focussing on imagination, the vocabulary of moral imagination promises to open up new spaces of moral experience. I will show in this book that the expectations and hopes of moral imagination theorists are warranted, but that their approach faces serious problems as well.

Secondly, some moral philosophers today are particularly dissatisfied with the Kantian approach to moral philosophy and the foundationalist, principle-seeking tradition it stands in. Pragmatists object to this approach³ and present their view as an alternative or at least a substantial change to what they call 'absolutism'. Johnson argues in *Moral Imagination* against the view that moral reasoning consists primarily

in ‘discerning the appropriate universal moral principle that tells us the single “right thing to do” in a given situation’ (Johnson 1993: 1), against the Kantian dichotomy morality versus prudence and against the view that there is ‘a single standard of human good’ (Johnson 1993: 252). And in *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* Fesmire argues that the Kantian tradition has overlooked the importance of imagination and calls for abandoning what he calls ‘the pursuit of a bedrock principle’ (Fesmire 2003: 3), ‘the hyper-rationalist quest for the grand theory or meta-ethical principle’ (57), and ‘the faculty psychology of the eighteenth century’ (61). In Sections 2.1 and 2.2, I will further discuss these claims when discussing the danger of relativism and conventionalism in the pragmatist approach, and in Chapter 7, I will show that this picture of Kantian and ‘absolutist’ moral theory is too one-sided and is better accommodated for conceiving of an important and necessary moral role of imagination than these authors suppose.

Thirdly, perhaps another normative thrust can explain the success of theories of moral imagination. Instead of separation, these new theoretical avenues seem to project the possibility of moral harmony between persons, between personal capacities, and between theory and practice. I will show this in the next sections and chapters, in particular in Chapter 3. I start with looking at contemporary pragmatist theory and the role it assigns to imagination in moral deliberation.

Note that there are many ‘pragmatisms’ and pragmatists. In this part of the book, I limit myself to Dewey and some contemporary thinkers inspired by Dewey (including Putnam). In Part III I will discuss Mead. This selection implies that others such as James or Rorty will receive less attention (although I will mention them where appropriate). However, a comprehensive discussion of pragmatism and an analysis of the similarities and differences within pragmatism is not my aim in this book. An interesting work on Dewey and his interpreters is *Beyond Realism and Anti-realism* (Hildebrand 2003), to which I shall refer where appropriate.

1.2. Roles: The imagination wizard

My systematic answer to the question of the role of imagination begins with an overview of the roles of imagination as found in the pragmatist literature: the projection of future scenarios, the use of imagination to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, the projection of personal and common ideals of life, our use of moral metaphors when we reason, the artistic expression of moral indignation, improvisation and tuning to create an action option and to reach agreement, the projection of images

of society, politics, and technology, the projection of a moral self-image or moral images of others, and the role of images and metaphor in moral theory. It seems that imagination is a kind of wizard⁴ for moral theory: it can do an amazing amount of tricks and it appears to open up a new perspective on moral experience and moral reasoning. In the next chapter, I will discuss its problems, but the magic of 'moral imagination' cannot be denied. Consider the following roles. In contrast to the literature, I will discuss these roles in a systematic way.

1.2.1. The projection of future scenarios

Future scenarios can be concerned with individual actions or collective actions, thus we can distinguish between the projection of a personal future and a collective future. Future scenarios are highly relevant for moral reasoning to the extent that the consequences of our actions matter morally. This does not imply that taking future scenarios into account in our reasoning is consequentialist per se; there may be other considerations we want to take into account. (Note that pragmatists put an emphasis on consequences, which, in spite of their fierce opposition to utilitarianism as a principle-based account, shows at least one proximity to it – and to other consequentialist moral theories.) An important and necessary role of imagination is that it allows us to explore the consequences of our individual and collective actions. According to Johnson, 'we need to explore imaginatively what it might mean, in terms of possibilities and enhanced meaning and relationships, for us to perform this or that action' (Johnson 1993: 187). Our projection of scenarios (as opposed to one single image – see below) takes a narrative form. Since our lives themselves have a narrative structure (196), imagination allows us 'to explore the consequences of decisions and commitments over an extended period of time' (197). Following Rorty and Nussbaum, Johnson suggests literature as a way to engage in such an exploration – he calls fiction a laboratory in which we can explore the implications of character and choice (199). However, this claim should not be interpreted as a defence of an exclusive focus on literature, but as a recommendation of literary exploration as an aid to the projection of scenarios we engage in the real, non-fictional world. When we deliberate, we test out various scenarios in our imagination. We tell stories to ourselves to consider the implications of our choices. I guess this is what Johnson means with imaginatively envisioning possibilities for acting, which he defines as 'the ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given situation' (Johnson 1993: 302).

Thus it seems to me that at least this part of the theory of moral imagination is an interpretation of consequentialism. It seems to involve the implicit argument that it is a moral requirement to consider the possible consequences of our actions. However, pragmatists argue that this is not primarily a matter of calculation, as many utilitarianists think and many professionals such as engineers and economists practice, but of imagination. The model for the perfect moral reasoner in this approach is not the human computer but the artist (author, story-teller, painter, director, and so on). Moral reasoning becomes an art:

We portray a situation, delineate character, formulate problems, and mould events. When we act we engage in various forms of creative making: we compose situations, build relationships, harmonise diverse interests, balance competing values and goods, design institutional practices, and orchestrate interpersonal relations. This is not merely an optional way of describing what we do, it is a precise account of what morally sensitive and perceptive people must do. (Johnson 1993: 212)

In *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* (2003), Fesmire endorses this view of moral reasoning as an art, in particular the art of drama. He argues that when we encounter a problem, alternatives 'are tested in thought as we *imaginatively* envision them carried out' until a solution is found (Fesmire 2003: 35). He calls this 'creatively tapping a situation's possibilities' (65): imagination 'amplifies perception beyond the immediate environment' (66). This imagination is not the exclusive possession of artists; non-artists are also invited to use moral imagination. For Fesmire, as for Johnson, deliberation is deeply social. Fesmire understands deliberation as dramatic rehearsal: 'To deliberate is to co-author a dramatic story with environing conditions in community with others' (Fesmire 2003: 78). Life narratives interplay with others, action is meaningless in isolation. We must rely on 'pooled, social intelligence' (82) to solve moral problems. Thus the normative implication of Fesmire's descriptive account of deliberation is that the projection of future scenarios is an imaginative and social process and that we should cultivate this skill.

1.2.2. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes

Following the influential work of Nussbaum we can consider another role of imagination: empathy, defined by Johnson as 'the ability to imagine *ourselves* in different situations and conditions at past and future times' (Johnson 1993: 199), in particular we can put ourselves in

someone else's shoes. I will say more about empathy in Part II of this book, but it is worth looking at pragmatist discussions of the term at this point. Johnson argues that Hume did make a too rigid separation between reason and feeling. Instead he proposes 'a blending of feeling, imagination, and reason' (200). He does not explain how this works, but the moral role of empathy is that we learn to inhabit the world of others (200) and therefore build a common world: moral imagination is public and shared (201). Following Dewey, Fesmire also refers to empathetic projection, which he defines as 'entering by imagination into the situation of others' (Fesmire 2003: 65). Fesmire accuses Kant of conceiving of empathy as morally worthless. Instead he thinks it is crucial in moral reasoning. In Kearney's words, 'without this imaginative ability [...] to put oneself in others' shoes, to identify oneself with their actions, thoughts or feelings, it is difficult to see how moral sentiment or reason could operate at all' (Kearney 1998: 230).

1.2.3. The projection of ideals of life

Moral deliberation can be concerned not only with single decisions and acts, but also with our personal life as a whole. And even if we deliberate about single acts, this deliberation can be informed by personal ideals of life. We may choose one option since it fits and confirms our ideal of how our life should be. This ideal is in turn influenced by ideals of life and personhood present in the culture and society in which we live. The same holds for reasoning about collective decisions and the ideals of collective life that may inform this reasoning. One form such collective ideal can take is that of an utopia. These utopias need not be political, as many people think, but concerns all dimensions of collective life. In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Ernst Bloch (1959) provides an overview of utopian projects in the history of ideas. He discusses utopias in the fields of medicine, social systems, technology, architecture, geography, art, and what he calls 'wisdom'. He provides examples such as Thomas More, Bacon, Dante, and Kant (the intelligible kingdom). Again these ideals of collective life are embedded in a social and cultural context.

The role of imagination in such ideals of personal and collective life is that of the projection of images that illustrate, express, and construct these ideals. For example, the catholic church has always projected images of Christ and the life of Christ, holding up a moral ideal of life to people. We may also think about images in commercials that express, if not construct ways of life. Kearney refers to this role of imagination as the 'utopian' and the 'testimonial' power of imagination (Kearney 1998: 226). According to him, the image of Christ and Christian narratives are

testimonial since they exemplify an otherwise abstract rule (230). But I believe this claim is too weak: they not only *exemplify* moral rules, but also construct an ideal of the moral life as a whole.

1.2.4. Metaphor

Images do not only enter moral deliberation as elements external to language. Rather they are interwoven with our moral language in the form of metaphors. When we reason, we use moral metaphors. For example, we say of person or a moral problem that it is a 'dirty' person or 'dirty' case. We say that a politician 'washes his hands in blood'. Metaphor is so much part of our moral language that we hardly notice its role.

In *Moral Imagination*, Johnson (1993) argues that moral reasoning is an imaginative activity based not on universal laws but on metaphors in at least two ways: moral concepts are defined metaphorically, and the way we conceptualise a particular situation depends on metaphors (Johnson 1993: 2). Again this makes moral reasoning deeply social, since we share imaginative structures with others. Johnson's arguments are based on empirical research in cognitive science and linguistics. In 1980, he argued (with Lakoff) in *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphors are not just a device of poets; rather they are part of everyday speech, perception, and thought – moral and non-moral (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In his 1993 book, he draws the implications for moral reasoning. He distinguishes the following ways in which metaphor plays a role in moral deliberation:

Metaphor enters our moral deliberation in three ways: (1) It gives rise to different ways of conceptualising situations. (2) It provides different ways of understanding the nature of morality as such (including metaphorical definitions of the central concepts of morality, such as will, reason, purpose, right, good, duty, well being, etc.). (3) Metaphor also constitutes a basis for analogising and moving beyond the 'clear' or prototypical cases to new cases. It gives us constrained ways to pursue these metaphorical extensions. It thus allows us to learn from experience in a way that is necessary if we are to grow in our moral understanding. (Johnson 1993: 10)

An example of a metaphor that is morally relevant is what Johnson calls the 'moral accounting metaphor': people can accumulate moral 'credit' and moral 'debt' (Johnson 1993: 49). He also claims that our moral

language is grounded in structures of bodily experience (Johnson 1993: 61), for example, someone can be said to be 'upright', 'pure', and so on.

Johnson's emphasis on social-cultural environment and bodily structure is shared by Fesmire. For contemporary pragmatists and their predecessors, the weight is not so much on the individual, autonomous self, but on the way environment changes, behavioural patterns, symbolic systems, stories, beliefs, metaphors, and so on make up our self as cultural beings. Furthermore we are at the same time embodied. For Fesmire and others, there is no barrier between nature and culture.

1.2.5. Art

The moral role of art in moral deliberation can be conceived of in various ways. I already referred to the production of images as testimonies and expressions of ideals of life, to the narrative structure our lives are said to have, to Nussbaum's claim that literature can stimulate the moral imagination, and to Fesmire's use of dramatical rehearsal as a metaphor for moral deliberation. To these roles we may add at least one not considered in the literature I looked at: the intentions of artists themselves – some artists and sometimes – to create work of arts with a moral message. Artists may express their moral indignation in a work of art and appeal to the public's moral sentiments.

1.2.6. Improvisation and tuning

Another role of imagination, discussed by Fesmire, is improvisation and tuning to create an action option and to reach agreement. This role is related to empathy, but is worth discussing on its own since here the use of empathy is not understood as an individual act but as a means to reach social harmony and agreement. To discuss this, Fesmire uses music, not drama, as a metaphor for moral reasoning. In particular, in his chapter on 'The Deweyan Ideal' he helpfully compares moral reasoning with jazz improvisation (Fesmire 2003: 93–6). He writes about the 'harmony and discord of daily interpersonal life' and stresses the empathetic dimension of 'moral compositions' (93). Why is empathy needed? Jazz improvisation is not completely anarchic: 'aesthetic rightness' and coordination must be reached, and this is difficult. 'One must improvise. At our best, we skilfully respond to each other with the aim of harmonizing interests. But coordinated impromptu thinking is difficult' (Fesmire 2003: 94). Empathy (or sympathy, as Fesmire calls it here)

is needed for all members 'to bend for the common result' (94). Improvisation is an interpersonal activity:

A jazz musician [...] takes up the attitude of others by catching a cadence from the group's signals while anticipating the group's response to her own signals. Drawing on the resources of tradition, memory, and long exercise, she plays *into* the past tone to discover the possibilities for future tones in the way moral imagination enables us to see the old in terms of the possible. (Fesmire 2003: 94)

Although there is no right way to do this, it is not arbitrary. The members of the group must listen to others. Fesmire claims that 'it would not romanticise jazz to observe that beauty in improvisation emerges as members revel in supporting others, not when they jockey for a solo' (Fesmire 2003: 94). But 'discordance is always possible' (95). Following jazz musician Michael Harper, Fesmire compares improvisation to a conversation: 'The problem is that sometimes people don't always understand what the *tone* of the conversation is' (Harper quoted by Fesmire 2003: 95), as is the case in other interpersonal interactions. 'Moral-agents/patients must respond empathically to each other instead of imposing insular designs, and they must rigorously imagine how others will respond to their actions. This is learned, with experience and practice' (Fesmire 2003: 95). Fesmire and Dewey stress 'the possibility of growth or maturation' (98). Growing itself, then, is an ideal, 'a moral end' (Fesmire 2003: 99). But since there are no separate selves, Fesmire says, this Deweyan ideal is not one of 'self-realisation' since 'there are no separate selves to realise' (100). Rather the goal is the common good. The imagination Fesmire and Dewey talk about is a '*social* imagination' (106; Fesmire's emphasis).

1.2.7. Images of society, technology, politics, ...

Earlier I mentioned ideals of collective life and utopia. This may falsely suggest that imagination is only relevant in normative projections of the unreal, non-existing or not-yet-existing. Rather imagination also has an important descriptive role in our representation or perception of (what we believe to be) the present, the real. When we reason about a collective moral problem, we rely on images of society, technology, politics, and so on. For example, if we perceive society as the sum of individuals in the way atoms are related to each other, our moral reasoning will be different than if we see society as an organic whole. We can distinguish between images of a certain domain as a whole (for example technology) and images related to the perception of particular societies, technologies, and

so on. For example, images from Hiroshima and the Chernobyl disaster influence our perception of nuclear technology (Coeckelbergh 2006b).

1.2.8. Images of self and others

We also have images of ourselves and of other persons, including moral self-images and moral images of others. These images can become the object of deliberation. Pragmatist thinking about moral identity stresses the role of imagination in changing our own identity. Johnson argues that we can use imagination to change ourselves: we can imagine new dimensions of our character, 'stretching ourselves beyond our present identity' (Johnson 1993: 203). Imagination is a means of personal change. The conceptions of ourselves are not fixed. Velleman argues in *Practical Reflection* (1989) and subsequent work that agents make sense of themselves by making up stories, by being involved in long-range deliberation making long-term plans, and by making up self-images. Influenced by James he writes:

Our options are as variable as the intentions that we could effectively form; our characters are as variable as the self-images that we could effectively endorse; *and yet we can never be sure of having exhausted the possibilities, since we can always try to invent new self-fulfilling conceptions of ourselves and our options.* Hence the deliberative question is not just how an agent like us should choose among options like ours but first what we and our options should be like. We have to invent our predicament before we can resolve it, and most of the work gets done in the invention, not the resolution. Deliberation is a creative and open-ended endeavour. It is the process by which we rewrite our lives, and its principles are those of lucid composition. (Velleman 1989: 258; his emphasis)

Velleman argues that this holds not only for practical reasoning, but for moral reasoning as well. When we ask ourselves the question 'Is this *me?*' we are engaged in moral evaluation, and according to Velleman sympathy is a requirement of good, rational reasoning (Velleman 1989: 305–7). Moreover he shares pragmatist views when stressing that apart from the self-knowledge of individual, solitary people we should also consider social self-understanding (310–13) – although he spends much less time on the latter than on the former. Finally Velleman thinks that 'being moral is the ultimate form of making sense' of ourselves (318). Although he does not explicitly mention the role of imagination here,

it is clear that the creation of self-images, of new (future) options, and of one's own narrative necessarily requires the use of imagination.

1.2.9. Images and metaphor in moral theory

Image and metaphor pervade moral theory. Even moral theories that reject any connection between imagination and morality, and emphasise reason or rationality, rely implicitly on imagination. For example, Plato's moral philosophy is partly based on the narrative and metaphor of the cave. Fesmire refers to Kant's image of a kingdom of ends and the utilitarian metaphor of deliberation as calculation (Fesmire 2003: 60). This argument about the role of imagination in philosophical *theory* deserves further development, but I need to be brief about it here not to distract from my main line of argument. But we can learn from pragmatist and other metaphor theories that it is illuminating to pay attention to metaphors used in philosophical writing. For example, in Chapter 2 I will discuss use of the terms 'guidance' and 'constraint' in relation to the role of imagination.

1.2.10. Conclusion: imagination as moral movement

Having shown that and how imagination plays various roles in moral deliberation, we may wonder if these roles have something in common. I observe that the role of imagination in moral reasoning is either understood in terms of the role of objects (images) or as a verb (the act of imagination). If we say 'the role of imagination' in moral reasoning we mean either the role of images in moral reasoning or the role of acts of imagination in moral reasoning. Such acts of imagination seem to rely on the notion of imagination as *projection*. And here we can distinguish between two kinds of projection. In his famous paper 'Imagination and the Self' Williams distinguishes between two modes of the imagination: imagining a certain thing distinct from myself that is such and such, on the one hand, and imagining being such and such, on the other hand (Williams 1973: 44). I propose to view these two modes as corresponding to two basic moral roles of the imagination: imagining the consequences of my actions and imagining being someone else. All other roles discussed above either refer to the role of images or to the role of imagining consequences or being someone else. My hypothesis, then, is that imagination allows moral movement: it allows us to move to the other and to the future. This is, as far as I can see at this point, what the roles of imagination discussed here have in common. I will return to this hypothesis later (end of Chapter 8), after I have further developed my argument in the course of the book, to see if 'imagination

as moral movement' is indeed a helpful way of summarizing the roles of imagination I analysed.

1.3. Implications for moral theory

If these are the roles of imagination in moral reasoning (and moral deliberation in particular), what are the implications for moral theory? Although pragmatists such as Johnson and Fesmire do not dismiss other moral theories in their entirety – they claim that they can be of pragmatic use – they reject their 'foundationalist' and 'absolutist' aspect. Their criticisms in this respect are mainly (but not exclusively) directed against Kant and Kantian moral theory. I will offer my objections against parts of their interpretation of Kant in the next chapter and in Chapter 7, but first I will summarise their arguments.

1.3.1. Against foundationalism and absolutism

Pragmatists are not opposed to principles as such, but argue that they do not play a central and foundational role in ethics. Johnson claims that moral reasoning is not based on universal laws and is not a matter of deduction but, rather, based on metaphor in the way explained earlier. In this view, moral principles do still play a role, but instead of prescriptions they are summaries of the collective (learning) experience of people. Following Dewey, he sees rules as guides rather than recipes for action. Principles are the crystallisation of insights that emerge from experience (Johnson 1993: 105). Rather than trying to find moral laws, then, we should cultivate moral imagination (12). Imagination's role in relation to principles is that it allows us to imagine the implications of taking certain principles as primary (106). According to Johnson, there is no ultimate ordering principle but a 'diversity of goods'⁵ (186). Given this condition, we need moral imagination to explore what it means for us to perform this or that action (187) but moral imagination would not tell us what to do. For Johnson, this is not the task of moral theory anyway. Its task is rather to enhance our understanding of moral problems and moral reasoning. Moral theory does not provide prescriptions but gives 'general guidance that comes from enhanced moral understanding and self-knowledge' (199).

Johnson argues against a rigid separation of the aesthetic from the moral. Morality is not the search for moral laws, but 'the ongoing imaginative exploration of possibilities for dealing with our problems' and 'the means for going beyond our selves [...] toward imagined ideals of what we might become' (Johnson 1993: 209). Such imaginative

exploration requires continuous experimentation which may imply the violation of accepted roles. We may miss some possibilities and ways of life. Furthermore what we need morally is not a fixed procedure but skills to cope with moral problems. Johnson concludes that moral problems are not solved by having moral laws, but by using imagination. And if there is an obligation, it is one to cultivate our moral imagination (215).

With his view Johnson criticises some assumptions of what he calls 'Moral Law folk theory' and 'our Enlightenment conception of morality'. Is morality objective? If there is any such thing as moral objectivity, Johnson thinks it does not consist in having a 'God's eye point of view', 'but rather in a specific kind of reflective, exploratory, and critical process of evaluation, carried out through communal discourse and practice' (Johnson 1993: 217; his emphasis). Furthermore Johnson criticises the dichotomy 'morality versus prudence' if this dichotomy amounts to the claim that most of what goes on in our deliberations is irrelevant to the morality of our actions. Similarly, he considers the dichotomy 'moral theory versus moral psychology' to amount to a narrowing down of the scope of morality as he understands it. Rather we should be concerned with describing how people do in fact make decisions in actual practices. Finally he does not think there exists 'a single standard of human good that presents itself as nothing more than a system of obligations' (249). Johnson instead proposes to view morality as having a broad scope: 'morality reaches, in varying degrees, into most aspects of our lives' (252). And this question of this scope must be kept open, since our conception of morality must change with evolving experience. (Perhaps we will extend the scope to embrace other forms of life than humans.) This does not mean that we cannot keep what Johnson calls 'our noblest Enlightenment Ideals' (255), but he proposes that we should revise them in an empirical light. For example, respect is not an absolute duty stemming from pure reason but a requirement for living together in harmony, moral principles encapsulate collective wisdom derived from shared moral experience, our freedom is embodied and imagination allows modest transformations in our experience and identity, and criticism is possible but not from an absolute totalising perspective (256–7). Against absolutism, Johnson offers suggestions for what he calls a 'humanly realistic morality' (259). With such a morality, we're never sure where we will end, 'guided only by our ideals of what we, and others, and our shared world might become' (260).

Fesmire echoes this criticism of moral absolutism and foundationalism and develops it by drawing on the classical pragmatist tradition. According to him, rather than the pursuit of a 'bedrock principle'

(Fesmire 2003: 3) we need 'a shift in the centre of gravity of ethics from foundational principles to imagination' (3). He starts his argument by explaining the model of the self as found in classical pragmatism. According to Fesmire, 'mind is not an ontological space under the jurisdiction of free will' (9); rather it is a function of 'the doings and under-goings of encultured, embodied, and historically situated organisms' (9). First, we are fundamentally social and cultural beings. Virtues are the products of interaction between individuals and the social world; moral character is 'interwoven with one's cultural horizon' (12). We can and do change our habits – customs are 'evaluated and reconstructed in light of circumstances' (13) – but for Fesmire and his pragmatist predecessors the weight is clearly on the social, cultural environment rather than on the individual. In this view, customs possess us and not vice versa. If our environment changes, different behavioural patterns, symbol systems, stories, beliefs, myths, shared metaphors, virtues, and so on emerge. Secondly, as cultural beings we are fundamentally embodied. The self is not 'an item in a container' (9). Fesmire rejects using such a metaphor in this context. We are not a mind stuffed in a container, there is no barrier between nature and culture. As Dewey had it, 'biological drives are transmuted by social life' (23). To use the metaphor implied in the phrase 'raw, animal natures' (23) – a metaphor that expresses the nature–nurture dualism of his opponents – I suggest that Fesmire thinks that our desires are not 'raw' basic biological drives, but are always culturally 'cooked'.

The implication of this view of the self is a rejection of views that base morality on transcendental reason, 'a non-social, emotion-free view from nowhere' (Fesmire 2003: 27). Kant made a distinction between moral reasoning and prudential reasoning. Fesmire claims that all reasoning is prudential, that there is no such thing as 'Reason itself', that reason is not separable from cultural, historical conditions and feelings. Under changing conditions we are stimulated to readjust our habits. Fesmire believes that the question for moral theory is not the search for a bedrock such as universal laws of reason, principles, or divine commands. Resisting what he calls the 'siren lure to the hyper-rationalist quest for the grand theory or meta-ethical principle that will systematically unify, without sacrificing robustness, competing ethical theories' (57), he argues that there is a plurality of factors in moral situations (as elsewhere, he follows Dewey here; see my discussion in the next chapter). Principles, rules, and procedures are granted a role in moral judgment and theory (58), but they cannot be defined in advance and are summaries of moral wisdom that should not pretend to be more

than 'guiding hypothesis that help open situations to inquiry' (59). They are to be tested. That is why, according to Fesmire, this view of morality, while rejecting a 'bedrock', does not entail radical relativism. Moral beliefs are hypothesis which can be confirmed or falsified; moral reasoning is in that sense comparable with scientific inquiry.

1.3.2. Against Kant

Given such a view of self and morality, it is unsurprising that Kant is seen by the pragmatist defenders of 'moral imagination' as a main opponent. Many of the arguments I summarised earlier are applicable, or thought by Fesmire and Johnson to be applicable, to Kant. It is worth looking at other arguments about and against Kant's moral theory not mentioned so far.

Johnson argues that a Kantian good will is not enough, we need imagination to envision potential help and harm that may result from our actions (see the consequentialist argument discussed in Section 1.2). He also points out that we need imagination to interpret Kant's categorical imperative: 'we cannot know what it means to treat someone as an end-in-himself, in any concrete way, unless we can imagine his experience, feelings, plans, goals, and hopes' (Johnson 1993: 200). I will take up this argument in Chapter 7 ('Kant and Kantians') when discussing interpretations of the categorical imperative.

Fesmire provides a more systematic criticism of Kantian moral theory. He starts opposing Kant's definition of imagination as a kind of thing:

The question What is the imagination? is loaded with the implication that there *is* such a ready-made thing. Imagination is thus conceived as an autonomous mental power – a primitive force instead of a function – whose task is to do specifiable things such as form images. Such reification⁶ flowered in the faculty psychology of the eighteenth century. Imagination's job, the dominant story ran, is to synthesise sensations from Perception into reproducible images (Kant's reproductive imagination) and relate them to the Understanding, which classifies and schematises the images (what Kant called the productive imagination) as instances of universal concepts (a process of judgment). Understanding then passes these on to Reason, which decides, perhaps consulting Memory, what to do about that matter. Reason orders Will to attend to it, hopeful that Will is strong enough to subdue the disruptions of Feeling. Imagination, on this view, is usually a trusty crafter of images but is given to mischief. Thus Kant's

suspicion. Imagination as free reflective play is essential to aesthetic judgment, for Kant, but in morals it is too self-indulgent. (Fesmire 2003: 61)

Fesmire claims that such a view of imagination has little relevance to practical issues. He criticises contemporary philosophers who somehow retain the Kantian split between self-contained faculties. Imagination, then, is given a limited role in morality (he refers to Larmore, Hare, and Werhane). Fesmire prefers Dewey's view that imagination is an integral part of human activity, including morality. Rather than proposing a definition of imagination such as 'the formation of mental images' he distinguishes two modes of imagination and their moral role empathetic projection and creatively tapping a situation's possibilities (see Section 1.2 above). Fesmire accuses Kant of conceiving empathy as morally worthless since Kant would think that 'it infuses feeling into motives for action instead of subjecting oneself to the command of reason alone' (Fesmire 2003: 67). It may be the case that we are prejudiced in favour of what or who is near and dear, but this is avoided if empathy is accompanied by a wide survey of the situation. He concludes that imagination is perhaps not sufficient but surely necessary to all moral judgment.

Both Fesmire and Johnson argue that action is meaningless in isolation, without context. They understand this to be an argument against Kant, whose procedural and principled moral reasoning seems to be a model for reasoning in isolation. Another argument related to their stress on the social aspect of moral reasoning is that just following formal rules is autistic rather than ideal. 'If morality were *reducible* to following rules or codes, high-functioning autism would be the moral ideal' (Fesmire 2003: 72), since the brains of autistic persons inhibit normal empathy. If Kant's moral theory does not rely on empathy at all, but stresses following rules, it seems that it is close to such an autistic 'ideal'. Moral imagination, on the contrary, is social since it allows us to grow together: 'Moral imagination can be artfully developed only through a socially responsive imagination that skilfully perceives paths of mutual growth' (Fesmire 2003: 126). According to him this implies that calculation and disengaged judgment are not responsible enough (Fesmire 2003: 129).

1.3.3. Morality as art: the moral imagination revolution

How far does Fesmire stretch the metaphor of morality as art? His view should not be confused with what he calls 'the familiar thesis that art

affects moral imagination'. If art really is a *metaphor* for morality, then what are the consequences? Fesmire is careful enough to discuss similarities as well as differences between art and morality.⁷ His proposal to replace the metaphor of business transactions by the metaphor of art is promising. Rather than focus on isolated actions of atomistic individuals, his view allows us to see ourselves as improvising stage players with 'interlocking' (111) acts and stories, challenged to 'respond to any new feature that the scene brings forward' (Nussbaum quoted by Fesmire 2003: 112), and ready to take on the role of others (Fesmire 2003: 112). And contrary to moral theories that focus on rule-following, this conception of morality as art brings in the possibility for personal creativity, while accommodating for the social and cultural dimension of our selfhood and moral agency. Such a view draws our attention to the skills we need to act morally. We need to be able to forecast responses of others and to take into account the actual responses of our 'audience'. We get a picture of the moral life as a dynamic, ongoing exploration of new possibilities, a continuous interaction and perhaps struggle with new situations.

Johnson's and Fesmire's claims are *revolutionary* in the sense that the normative aspect of their discussions of 'moral imagination' as a descriptive theory of moral reasoning is not the desire and the proposal merely to adapt existing 'absolutist' and 'foundationalist' theories. In order to respond to the complexity of moral experience, they want to reform prior theories in a more radical way by removing their absolutist and foundationalist assumptions and by shifting their central focus to imagination. Consider Fesmire's thesis about the role of imagination in moral deliberation:

[Imagination] is at the foreground of deliberation and so must be central, not merely supplementary, to moral judgment and knowledge. Piecemeal adjustment to contemporary moral philosophies cannot accommodate this. [...] Yet a Copernican shift centring ethics on imagination *can* accommodate what is of pragmatic worth in these philosophies. (Fesmire 2003: 68)

Thus Fesmire neither rejects nor dismisses existing moral philosophies, and he does not deny that principles play a role in moral deliberation – to deny this would indeed be 'preposterous' (Fesmire 2003: 58). Rather he admits that they are 'often indispensable' (58). His point is that rules should be taken as *guides*, as tools 'to be tested and confirmed' (59).

The Copernican shift Fesmire proposes, then, is that imagination, not principles, should occupy the *centre* of moral deliberation:

If there *must* be a central focus in ethical theorizing, as convention dictates, we should consider imagination for this role, and not merely as a minor supplement to a theory of rules. (Fesmire 2003: 60)

Although Fesmire suggests in this passage that to speak of a 'centre' in relation to ethics is not the most creative or most appropriate way of speaking – at one point he remarks that 'there is no central component' (60) and that a 'Copernican revolution' implies a fixed centre – he goes on to defend a 'Copernican shift' (60) in conjunction with his claim that 'imagination intervenes deeply in moral life' (68). Is such a Copernican shift necessary or desirable? The thesis of this book is that it is neither necessary nor desirable, but that we should further explore the relation between imagination and principles. I will argue that neither imagination nor principles must be 'central', but that both are equally necessary and important. Fesmire's imagination-centred pragmatism and the principles-centred view he opposes share a centre-periphery schema. We must move beyond this way of thinking. In the course of the book, this claim will be given substance and argumental support. For now, I conclude that we meet in contemporary pragmatist theory an attractive view that opens up new possibilities for moral theory. The accounts of 'moral imagination' Johnson and Fesmire provide shed new light on what it is to engage in moral reasoning. I will further discuss the implications for moral reasoning and theories of moral reasoning in the next chapter.

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