

Embodied Culture: Towards a Normative Theory of Cultural Practices

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Abstract

We sketch the basic pillars of what we coin *Cultural Ethics* as an attempt to break the bonds of cognitivist takes on Ethics that are exclusively based on language and narratives as means towards founding moral principles. The limitations of narration-based ethics are normatively relevant, which is why we argue that other cultural practices have to be included to initiate a process of increasing self-awareness that has the purpose of reaching common moral ground. In order to get there, we present and build on findings from evolutionary biology over neuroscience to psychology and narratology. These findings paint a pretty coherent picture about human perception, wellbeing, and decision making that reveal (a) the fundamentally dynamic nature of human existence and (b) a deep interwovenness of the “individual” with the “social” and “environmental.” These findings are used to sketch a social theory as well as to dissect the limitations of traditional cognitivist takes with the example of Discourse Ethics in the Habermasian tradition. We then move on to sketch a more theory of cultural practices and Cultural Ethics.

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1. Introduction

“There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

David Foster Wallace

At least since the European enlightenment, the better part of Western thinking took a cognitivist approach towards ethics. Ethics, according to this view, is about giving reasons within a fair arena of moral deliberation (Kolm 1996). Implicit to this view is the assumption that language and narratives are an adequate and in fact the only legitimate vessel for the ethical endeavor. This reliance on language and narratives is presupposed both, at the individual level (what do I owe to myself and what do I owe to others?) as well as the social level (how do we reach an agreement about principles of justice and morality?)

This “take” on ethics rests on epistemic and ontological premises that lead to skeptic interpretations of different variations of is-ought dualities with respect to the possibility to assign truth-value to normative principles (Putnam 2003).

Even if it appears to be the self-evident, “default” approach to most modern Westerners, it should be stressed that it is far from self-evident. Eastern philosophies in the Buddhist, Taoist, or Hindu traditions as well as traditional Western philosophies in the tradition of virtue ethics, for example, all start from different epistemic principles and at the same time are less convinced about what has sometimes been coined the “correspondence theory of language” or “truth,” the (metaphysical) assumption that everything that “is” can be expressed by means of language (David 2016).

At the same time, modern Western thinking in the social sciences as well as ethics rests on the premise of a relatively independent and autonomous self. From this perspective, the normative perspective on society becomes a coordination- or cooperation-problem among these autonomous selves. However, research from many different fields provides evidence that the dividing line between individual and society, between “self” and “other” is much more blurred than usually assumed. From a normative point of view, this may be problematic if the discrepancy between the autonomous self from theory and the blurred self out into the wild is of ethical significance.

This paper is an attempt to bring together very different strands of literatures ranging from evolutionary biology over neuroscience to psychology and narratology to assess the limitations of traditional takes on social and ethical theory. The result is a strange beast in multiple respects. In Sections 2-4 we compile evidence from the above-mentioned fields in order to build a model of human perception, wellbeing, and decision-making. What becomes visible is a relatively coherent picture that can be used to conceptualize a human being as a *dynamic multi-level adaption mechanism*. In Section 5 we sketch how this micro-perspective of human behavior and human action can be integrated into the meso- or macro-perspective of social theory.

Sections 6 and 7 are the normative core of this paper. In Section 6 we use the results from previous line of argumentation to develop a normative critique of ethical theories in the cognitivist tradition. In order to do so, we focus on Discourse Ethics in the Habermasian tradition. Finally, we try to bring the different pieces of the puzzle together in Section 7 where we develop a generalized process-oriented cultural theory of ethics that characterizes structural elements of “spaces of resonance” that can be used to reach common moral ground. According to this view, language and narratives are one among other cultural practices that enable a process of moral learning. Cultural Ethics breaks the narrow and normatively relevant bonds of cognitivist Discourse Ethics, among others. The picture that comes into view is vision of Cultural Ethics as a set of processes that brings Western ethical thinking back into contact with its own ancient past but also with Eastern philosophies. This, from our point of view, is not only important to create a deeper awareness of the power structures within a given society, but also to build bridges between societies that differ widely in their language games and cultural

practices. Cognitivist, language-based ethics necessarily suffer from the immanent symbolic power that exists if different cultures have to coordinate on a single language (Bourdieu 1989). Given the above-mentioned limitations of language for ethics this may be ways to reach common moral ground in a globalized world.

Our approach breaks with the mainstream in at least two respects. First, it scrutinized the appropriateness of the cognitivist take by highlighting the ineffable quality of (normative) experiences. And second it deviates from the current trend in Ethics, Business Ethics, and Normative Economics to focus on findings from behavioral economics, and experimental ethics to “broaden the picture.” Behavioral economics and experimental ethics inform us about some aspects of the individual perception of the moral dimension of decisions and decision-contexts. Given the static nature of most experiments, they provide snapshots of the cognitive-narrative and affective perception of situations of the subjects. This research is important insofar as it can shed light on moral intuitions and how they depend on the numerous potential situational conditions in which they are embedded or narratively constructed. (However, it suffers from some deep methodological issues like the role of auxiliary assumptions in the interpretation of empirical findings as well as the problem of external validity.)

As we will argue below, however, current research programs in behavioral economics and experimental ethics have for methodological reasons two additional types of limitations that one has to take into consideration in order to assess their contributions. First, the human affective and narrative experience of reality is fundamentally dynamic in nature. Second, the implications of empirical findings on the moral perception decision problems for the normative social sciences are unclear. The reason is not foremost a dichotomous perception of “is” and “ought” (which is in itself dependent on a normative setting of a specific epistemology) but a result of the dynamic nature of the human mind and body-brain.

2. A Dynamic Model of Multi-Level Adaption

From an evolutionary perspective, a species as well as every member of a species is the result of an ongoing process of adaption into an environment that is itself adaptive (that is, other living beings are part of it). Evolution in populations is the result of three basic principles: (1) There are traits that are heritable, (2) there is variability in them, and (3) some traits are more adaptive than others, which implies that the organisms pass more copies of their genes on to the next generation (Sapolsky 2005). Traits that are maladaptive in a given environment are usually referred to as *mismatch* (Lieberman 2013). For individual human beings, it is useful to distinguish between five levels of adaption, genetic, epigenetic, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive.*

Adaption at the genetic level is a process that takes place between generations by a process of sexual reproduction and mutation (Moore 2015). Genetic mutations within the lifespan of a single individual usually lead to illness and are therefore maladaptive. In the following we will focus on individual human beings and take the genetic endowment as coded by the DNA as given. Please note that if genetic adaption were the only mechanism by which a member of a species can adapt into an environment, its behavior could be described by a fixed stimulus-response scheme.

From the point of view of evolutionary biology, there must have been fitness advantages for organisms that have the possibility to modify their stimulus-response schemes within the lifetime of a given organism. The basic tradeoff seems to come into play because of the

* There are other mechanisms of adaption that do not fall under this scheme, like for example the immune system. The reason that we do not include these mechanisms into consideration is that at least to our knowledge research has not shown (yet?) that these adaptations have a significant impact on affective or cognitive perception and decision-making. However, there is growing evidence that for example the human microbiome can influence its host’s perception and behavior (Mayer et.al. 2014, Dinan et.al. 2015).

endogeneity and instability of the environment into which an organism adapts. If the environment were stable, genetic adaptation would lead to an optimally adapted organism in the long run. However, as soon as the environment is unstable, this process may be too slow, creating room for behavioral modifications within the lifespan of a single organism.

The next level is *epigenetic adaptation* (Moore 2015). Not all genes of the DNA are transcribed, some of them are 'switched on,' others 'switched off' (which is called *gene expression*). Importantly, this mechanism does not change the DNA itself. Today's leading theory suggests that methyl groups sitting beside a corresponding gene are responsible for the transcription or discarding of genes. They act as 'gene switches.' Whether switches are turned on or turned off is not exogenously given but depends on the interaction of the organism with the environment. Changes in diet, exposure to certain elements in the environment, and other encounters influence the position of the gene switches. These positions, in turn, influence the metabolism, behavior, and consciousness of an organism (Moore 2015). In addition, recent research seems to show that the gene switches are not all wiped out in the process of fertilization of an egg by a sperm but are heritable. The implication is that our environment can have an influence on our children's health, behavior, and perception. Path-breaking but controversial research with Holocaust survivors shows that traumatic experiences change gene expression in a way that not only leads to all kinds of mental and physical problems for the victims of trauma later on in their lives, and that they are also passed on to their children and grandchildren (Yehuda et.al. 2016).

The mechanism of environment-dependent gene expression can have positive as well as negative effects on the wellbeing of the individual organism, but most of the current research has focused on negative effects regarding physical and mental health. Caspi et. al. (2003) demonstrated that subjects who have switched on a specific gene were more likely to develop adult depression and suicidality when exposed to childhood maltreatment compared to subjects whose gene was switched off.

A large variety of environmental influences impact on gene expression, ranging from parenteral nutrition, *in utero* exposure to stress, male-induced maternal effects such as attraction of differential mate quality, or maternal as well as paternal age. The effects on physical and mental health range from an increased propensity to addiction, anxiety disorders, increased likelihood to develop depression, and fear conditioning (Carey 2011).

The importance of this mechanism of adaptation is that it shows that environmental factors have important and long-reaching consequences for physical and mental health (Carey 2011) as well as the perception of reality of an organism (Moore 2015). The way we think of ourselves and the way we behave is not only influenced by our genetic heritage but also by the epigenetic effects of our histories and the histories of our predecessors. If we want to identify the behavioral and perceptual consequences of our epigenetically 'calibrated' DNA with preferences, we see that they are endogenous at a very 'deep' level. The way reality is perceived (as threatening or not, for example), the way we behave, and the hedonic implications of all that are to an extent that is difficult to assess with the given state of research consequences of the coincidences of our upbringing.

In the two following sections, we are especially interested in the next three levels, that is, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive adaptation which we will outline sketching an individual theory of human behavior.

3. Human Behavior: Affects, Habits, and Health

When it comes to *affects*, the terminology in affective neuroscience and psychology is pretty confusing, which is why it makes sense to start with precise definitions. We follow Damasio (2010, see also Damasio, Damasio, and Tranel) and LeDoux (2002, 2015) in distinguishing between emotions, feelings, and affects. Emotions are changes in both, body and brain states in response to external as well as internal stimuli. Physiological changes can be muscle tone, heart rate, posture, blood pressure, etc. They are part of a homeostatic regulation system that

helps the organism to survive and reproduce. These reactions are adaptive; the body-brain learns over time and calibrates itself according to the respective environment.

This definition implies that *emotions* as dynamic response mechanisms are not conscious. Feelings, however, are. *Feelings* are the conscious equivalent of emotions that pass the threshold of consciousness, and therefore also the threshold from the third-person perspective of biochemical mechanisms of the body-brain to the first-person experience of these mechanisms (mind). The term affect encompasses both, emotions and feelings.

The relationship between emotions and feelings is complicated. For example the fact that the conscious feeling called anxiety (which is a first-person subjective experience) is also the name for a specific class of bodily reactions to stimuli (emotions) may be the cause of profound confusion. Second, as soon as a phenomenon enters consciousness, we experience it as a mental concept; feelings have usually a narrative form. But this implies that we cannot disentangle language from feelings, and therefore the social conventions that shape language and the subtle layers of meaning associated with words and sentences. The consequence is that we do not have a culture-independent concept of feelings.

Emotions are an important mechanism to steer an organism's behavior (Rolls 2014). But without the ability of the emotional system to adapt according to the specific environment it would be far less effective (Öhmann und Wiens 2003). And it is impossible to disentangle conscious feelings and emotions when trying to understand the functioning of this “system.” Evoked affects are consciously or unconsciously associated with memories, and thereby influence the behavior of the organism one way or the other. This process of emotional calibration can be conceptualized as follows. According to the *predictive brain hypothesis* (Clark 2016), an organism has an impulse-response mechanism that it has inherited from the past. The organism builds a model of its environment that leads to hypotheses about what will most likely be happening in the future. This “ H_0 hypothesis” is then confronted with what actually happens to the organism. If what actually happens is close to the expectation, the H_0 -hypothesis gets reinforced. If, however, there are substantial deviations, the H_0 -hypothesis gets modified. This way, the organism calibrates itself into its environment, memories about sensual stimuli together with emotions are ‘stored’ in the brain. This process also may leave traces at the conscious level of feelings.

What we have said so far also sheds light on the fact that the sequence of sensory input-decision-outcome triggers two distinct types of affective ‘rewards,’ the anticipatory reward that results from the trigger and that induces affects when we make a decision, and the actual reward if a desired (or punishment if an undesired) outcome occurs (Duhigg 2012). Let us focus on a conscious decision to make the point. Typically, the anticipatory is stronger than the actual reward, which makes sense from an evolutionary perspective: the primary purpose of feelings is to learn and influence behavior. From this perspective, the actual reward is a waste of precious energy. The reason why we get an actual reward is that it is necessary for the calibration of the affective system: The anticipatory reward is based on an H_0 -hypothesis regarding the likely consequences of behavior. This hypothesis can be wrong, which is why the actual reward is used as a learning mechanism. This view is supported by research on habituation and addiction. It is typical that the actual reward gets weaker and weaker over time the more habituated behavior becomes. Habituation means that the calibration of the affective system gets better and better, which implies that the actual reward becomes less and less necessary to calibrate. In the end, if some kind of behavior is completely habituated it ceases from consciousness altogether (Duhigg 2012). This is a typical pattern when people develop addictions (Lewis 2016). In the beginning, the affective reward of some substance or activity is extremely strong, which leads to craving and rapid calibration of the system. But it is typical that over time, the positive affective ‘kick’ loses its force.

Fear is an affect that is especially well studied. While research on other affects is not as advanced, the consensus seems to be that the basic mechanisms must be similar. LeDoux (2015) has the hypothesis that there are two pathways for sensual inputs inside of the brain. Take a visual signal of a dark, lengthy object as an example. This signal goes from the retina to the visual thalamus (unconscious recognition of the object) and then directly to the

amygdala that makes a first, bold assessment of the relevance of the object (still without conscious recognition). The signal goes also to the visual cortex that is responsible for the conscious recognition of the object. The snakelike shape may lead to a freeze-reaction by the amygdala and an activation of the fight-or-flight response of the body (increase in heart rate, muscle tone, ...). This is an emotional reaction. A signal may then be sent from the Amygdala to the prefrontal cortex. The first signal from the visual thalamus to the visual cortex always takes longer than the signal to the amygdala, which implies that the first bodily reaction occurs without conscious participation. It is only now and only if the emotional reaction is of sufficient importance that consciousness kicks in and collects more information to form a better hypothesis about the dark, lengthy object. If the event passes the threshold of consciousness, two signals are represented, the visual information about the lengthy object (from the thalamus) and an anxious feeling (from the amygdala and the bodily reactions triggered by it). This hypothesis has two parts, it can confirm or reject that it is a snake, and it becomes aware of the emotional reaction in form of feeling fear. If the interpretations of the lengthy object are consistent, there is no conflict between the emotional reaction and the conscious interpretation. If they are inconsistent, either the conscious or the emotional reaction gets the steering wheel. However, this conflict of interests is manipulated in favor of the emotional reaction because there are more neural pathways going from the amygdala to the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex than *vice versa*. This implies that it is difficult to calm down if the emotional circle is in full swing, even if you consciously know that there is no danger.

Most of our daily businesses are managed by the unconscious emotional system of our body. It is only a minority of decisions that reach the level of consciousness. The predictive-brain hypothesis gives an explanation (Clark 2016): According to this hypothesis, an organism can be conceptualized as an adaptive multi-level system of intervention. If the calibrated stimulus-response mechanism leads to outcomes that are consistent with the predictions of the brain, the task is handled by the lower level (for example the autonomic system or the emotional system). It is only in cases with a sufficiently large prediction error that 'higher' levels are included. This is when we become conscious of some aspect of our environment. The priority of the unconscious, emotional system is an effective way of the organism to economize on scarce resources while keeping itself alive and ready to reproduce. The fact that our behavior is unconsciously influenced before we have a conscious model of reality has first been confirmed in Damasio's seminal 'Iowa gambling task' and often confirmed since then (Damasio 1994).

Affective Memory, Narratives, and Mismatches

Human body-brains have evolved a remarkable ability to calibrate into their environments in order to protect them against threats and that utilizes consciousness and language (in a broad sense) (Leary 2003, Petty et.al. 2003). So far, we have argued that an experience of, say, being confronted with a harmful or life-threatening event triggers a recalibration of the affective system, be it conscious or not. If you are attacked by a dog in a street and survive the encounter, an affective memory is created linking certain distinctive properties of the environment (the smell, the type of houses in the street, the colors, etc.) as well as the kind of dog with an affective load. The next time you go to a place that -- consciously or unconsciously—reminds you of this street, the affective memory is reactivated in order to steer you away from the potential threat. The 'logic' of the affective memory differs from the logic of conscious, rational contemplation. It may be that you avoid streets that are reminiscent of the one you had the bad encounter in for the rest of your life without even knowing it and even if they are in a different city.

This mechanism can be found in a lot of animals, but what is especially pronounced in humans is that they do not have to make the bad experience themselves to create affective memories (Mesquita 2003). Listening to the stories of other people suffices to do the job. The amygdala does not perfectly distinguish between real threats and imagined threats. This mechanism has a lot of potential advantages from the point of view of group selection, because the stories of your 'tribe' help you with your affective calibration and so you have to live through fewer (life-) threatening events. However, the downside is that your amygdala also reacts to

fabricated stories and associates its affective loads with imagined threats that do not exist in reality. However, the affective memories can be long-lasting and create an *affective map of reality* that shapes behavior as well as the conscious perception in the form of narratives we use as sense-making devices for our affects and behavioral reactions. This is why news and movies work at an affective level and leave long-lasting traces in our minds.

It is important to note that the described system is dynamic in nature (Mesquita 2003). It continuously updates itself by creating new memories and combining them with emotions or feelings. This adaptive mechanism has two important elements. The first aspect of the dynamic nature is that the system calibrates itself in a functional way to its environment, where functional refers to the concept of adaptability. There are different mechanisms of adaption that are distinguished psychologists, non-associative learning mechanisms like habituation und sensitization and associative learning mechanisms like classical and operand conditioning. Non-associative learning is a relatively permanent change in the strength of response to a stimulus due to repeated exposure to that stimulus. For example for the case of habituation, the strength of the response diminishes with repetitions. Associative learning, on the other hand, is a process by which an association between two stimuli or a type of behavior and a stimulus is created. The term habit refers to a stable pattern of behavior that is induced by a trigger or cue. Usually, the process of creating habits relies on both, associative learning like classical conditioning (the ringing of a bell signals a coffee break) and non-associative learning like habituation (I more or less automatically go to the coffee machine and have a coffee).

This type of adaption is possible because the brain is plastic, which is seen as a prerequisite for the ability to learn in this broad sense. But the learning mechanism is not arbitrarily versatile. Even though the brain remains plastic up until old age, new experiences build on older ones, which itself creates a certain 'stickiness' of the learning mechanism. This stickiness creates the possibility of affective mismatches that may not only be problematic from an evolutionary perspective of adaptability (ultimate causes) but also from the point of view of subjective experience (proximate causes).

This has basically three potential reasons.

1. The first one exists if the individual experiences that shape the calibration process are not representative for the environment in which the organism lives. In that case, the calibration remains imperfect, which creates a mismatch.
2. Second, the stickiness of the calibration process may create mismatches in a world with a rapidly changing environment. In this case, the calibration process is always lagging behind, and if it is slower than the changes in the environment, the mismatch increases over time.

Up to now we have not properly distinguished between ultimate and proximate causes (Tinbergen 1963), a distinction that is of crucial importance in evolutionary biology. From an evolutionary perspective, adaptability is the ultimate cause according to which all traits are measured. From this perspective, our conscious experience of reality is only a means to this end. Happiness, sensual pleasure, serenity or mindfulness are only means (proximate causes) that may motivate our behavior to the end of survival. Evolution is about getting kids, not making us (as consciously experiencing organisms) happy. Normative economics in the tradition of welfarism (irrespective of whether you have a hedonic or desire-fulfillment interpretation of welfare) therefore puts an emphasis on proximate causes. This distinction becomes relevant with the next potential reason for adaptive mismatch.

3. From the point of view of the conscious and subconscious experience of reality, some calibrations of the affective system seem to be clearly maladaptive, and they may even be maladaptive from the point of view of ultimate causes. A good example is trauma. Extensive research over the last couple of years has shown that PTSD is the result of a massive reaction of the organism to an external life-threatening stimulus (van der Kolk 2014). It has long-term consequences for the affective experience of reality of the affected person (some of these effects seem to even be caused by epigenetic effects, see before). These long-term consequences clearly impair with the subjective experience of life of the

victims. But from an evolutionary perspective, this is only a proximate cause. It may be that the massive reactions of the organism to life-threatening events are in fact a functional adaptation. Research on so-called ‘behavioral biases’ (Baron 2007) has revealed that we have a large number of conservativity or negativity biases, which makes perfect sense from an evolutionary perspective because the ultimate threat for a trait is not to survive. Hence, if a situation is classified as life-threatening, it makes sense that (unconscious) memory and affective calibration mechanisms are extremely active to avoid getting into such a situation in the future again. So there might be a gap between the ultimate cause of survival and the proximate cause of happiness that is in fact pretty standard: negative affects like pain and disgust have an important constructive role from the point of view of ultimate but not necessarily from the point of view of proximate causes.

Cultivated Habits, Cultivating Habits

The second aspect of the dynamic nature is that it has a tendency to habituate by creating routines, and these routines are getting more and more subconscious over time (Kessler 2016, LeDoux 2002, 2015, Rolls 2014). We will discuss both aspects of the process of habituation in turn.

Our brains constantly try to reduce the cognitive load of decision-making by developing routines that over time ‘sink’ into the unconsciousness. This mechanism of conditioning and habituation is automatic, we cannot prevent it from happening. What we can, however, influence is the type of habit that we develop over time.

A key role in this process of creating habits is played by the basal ganglia that are based in the forebrain (Duhigg 2012). There is a typical dynamic pattern in the development of brain activities when a creature learns a new habit. In an experiment, rats had to learn to navigate a labyrinth to get a reward (chocolate). The reward was always at the same place in the labyrinth, so they could learn the right turns over time. The rats got faster over time, showed less active search behavior (like prying), and made fewer mistakes over time. At the same time, there was a characteristic change in the activation patterns of their brains. The better they became in finding the reward, the less mental activity there was in their brains. Within a week, even the activity in those areas that are associated with memory went down. The brains of the rats had created a perfectly automated routine; they were able to navigate the labyrinth without any conscious effort. The routinized patterns of motion were ‘stored’ in the basal ganglia of their brains whereas all the other areas were almost completely discharged from the activity; a new habit had been formed.

Duhigg (2012) argues that the process of habit-formation in humans follows the same patterns. Schrödinger (2015 [1967]) formulated the properties of this process very precisely: *“Any succession of events in which we take part with sensations, perceptions and possibly with actions gradually drops out of the domain of consciousness when the same string of events repeats itself in the same way very often. [...] The gradual fading from consciousness is of outstanding importance to the entire structure of our mental life, which is wholly based on the process of acquiring practice by repetition. [...] [C]onsciousness is associated with the learning of the living substance; its knowing how (Können) is unconscious.”*

Habits are ubiquitous. It is the body-brain's way of handling complexity if it detects patterns over time (Duhigg 2012, Kessler 2016). The process of conditioning and habituation reduces the cognitive load of decision-making, freeing cognitive resources to focus on new impressions. Sometimes, the creation of new habits is the result of a conscious decision (‘I want to learn how to play the guitar’), but most of the time new habits form without our knowledge and without any conscious decision to do so. It is the default mode of our body-brain.

Again, results from rat experiments make the point. One variation of the above-mentioned series of experiments was to start a new round with a typical (klick-) sound. As soon as the rat hears the sound, its brain activity spikes: the rat anticipates the reward. At that point in time, the body-brain ‘decides’ whether to delegate behavior to a routine or not. If there are no new stimuli, the brain activity goes down, the rat delegates behavior to the automatic mode, and

the next time that brain activity spikes is when the rat finds the reward (Duhigg 2012). This three-step pattern is typical for the *habit cycle* (Duhigg 2012): The cycle gets activated by a *trigger* (the sound) that causes a chain of *routinized behavior* that leads to a *reward*. This reward further strengthens the cycle, and this process of routinization is the more effective, the more stable the environment is. Almost every stimulus can become a trigger, a sound, a smell, a point in time, a specific place or person or an emotion. Rewards can also vary considerably and range from food, sex or drugs to narratively constructed concepts like success, social prestige, or emotions and feelings that are not directly linked to ‘reality’ but to imaginations etc.

But the next question is, of course, what happens to the process if the environment is no longer stable? The above-mentioned experiment got modified to at least partially answer this question. After the habit was firmly in place, the experiment was modified by randomizing the physical reward. Sometimes, the primate got the reward if it correctly pushed the button, sometimes not. The visible reaction of the primate when the reward was denied was anger and frustration, and these reactions corresponded to patterns of brain activities that were typical for craving and frustration. A permanent denial of the physical reward led to signs of annoyance and depression (Duhigg 2012).

The strength of the established habit was also important for the primate's reaction to frustrating its expectations. In another treatment the primate had the opportunity to divert its attention away from the experiment or to quit the experiment altogether by leaving. Primates with relatively weak habits made use of these alternatives to either calm their frustration or to quit. But those primates with deeply established habits were no longer free to divert themselves or to quit; their craving for the physical reward was too strong.

If one is willing to take the leap from experiments with primates to human beings it can be argued that this is the point where a functional habit becomes dysfunctional, that habits are to ‘sticky’ to stay functional if the environment changes rapidly. In this case, behavior and interest are no longer the same. Primates and human beings suffer but are not able to change their behavior. Lewis (2016) argues that the basic mechanism is identical for all habits, which implies that the difference between chocolate cake and heroin, Facebook friends and crack or pornography and alcohol is only a matter of degrees.

Given our individual histories and experiences the set of habits that establish a large part of what we might call ‘identity’ (Leary 2003) is most likely a mixed bag of functional as well as dysfunctional routines. Most moderately functional adaptations are probably not important enough to qualify as dysfunctional in the sense that they require measures to change them. But still, the fact that habits are a key adaptation mechanism of our body-brains, we get a new normative perspective on the relationship between individual and society: As stressed by virtue ethics, there are better and worse habits, and they are to a large extent a result of the environments in which we grow up and live. If we acknowledge that some of our habits are potentially dysfunctional we have established a conceptual normative gap between behavior and interest that allows it to discuss how different social environments impact on our habits and how the different environments can be ranked according to their expected impacts on our abilities to lead a fulfilling life.

One of the key points by scholars in virtue ethics is that human flourishing requires that we try to actively influence this process of habit formation and, thus, actively cultivating habits. From the point of view of human flourishing and happiness, the risks and opportunities of this process of conditioning and habituation are obvious: we might develop habits that partly ‘enslave’ us once they are firmly in place. If these habits are well-adapted to the environment, they play a positive role for leading a life that flourishes. However, if they are dysfunctional, they hamper human flourishing (Lieberman 2013).

Affects and Health

We have argued before that almost all phenomena qualify as potential triggers. However, some triggers are more deeply ‘engrained’ than others, and it can be argued that economic progress led to mismatches in a large class of behaviors exactly because it (unintentionally, at least in

the beginning) created goods and services that appeal to these triggers without taking care of the larger context in which they evolved (genetically or memetically) (Lieberman 2013). Lieberman (2013) develops the argument that our bodies and brains evolved into an environment that differs substantially from the environment in which most of us live in today, which creates problems because of mismatch.

Take sugar as an example. There exists an inversely u-shaped relationship between sugar intake and health: If the human body gets too much or too little sugar, metabolism cannot work properly and the person gets sick. For the most part of human history, sugar was in scarce supply, which is why our affective reward system is not isomorphic to the sugar-health relationship. Instead, given that more sugar was always better than less sugar, we have an impulse (get a positive affective reward) to eat additional sugar. Only after the availability of sugar from sugar beets and sugar-like sweeteners from high fructose corn syrup, it became abundant, which implies that most of us have a sugar intake that brings us to the downward-sloping branch of the sugar intake-health curve. However, our affective reward system still rewards us for more sugar. This is an example for a mismatch (Lieberman 2013). But things get even more problematic because different to raw fruit which delivers sugar together with a whole bundle of ingredients, most of them with positive health effects in the naturally available quantities, processed food carves out most of the other useful and health-relevant nutrients, leaving only the impulse-generating ingredient sugar. Our affective reward system is not fine-tuned to all the different nutrients because it was not necessary to evolve rewards for all different ingredients separately because nutrients come in bundles in non-processed food. Processed food that triggers via sugar is like a Potemkin village that leaves only the facades of the buildings intact. Processed food is often thinned out to the point where product exclusively appeals to the craving mechanism (Lieberman 2013).

According to this hypothesis, our diet is problematic for our health and experience because it is optimized according to our affective reward system that is out of tune with health. But it does not stop with sugar. We get an affective reward for more comfort because it was always scarce; we followed this desire to create an environment in which we do not sufficiently exercise. We are genetically programmed to be interested in sex and are affectively rewarded for it, and we created internet pornography, another Potemkin village that leaves only the outer hull of desire intact. There are good evolutionary reasons to focus on external threats, and we created a media landscape that drowns us in violence. We needed friends to survive and ended up with ‘Facebook friends.’ Mercier and Sperber (2017) even go so far as to argue that today’s use of reason can be classified as a mismatch because the ability to reason developed in a different context.

4. Human Action: Cognition and Metacognition

As with the terms emotion, feeling, and affect, the term cognition is used inconsistently in the literature. We are exclusively using the term *cognition* to refer to conscious, deviating from definitions of the term that include unconscious activities of the brain (Graziano 2013, Pessoa 2013). Cognition is therefore the activity of the mind, and we have crossed the divide between the third- and first-person perspective which is why we refer to it as human action versus human behavior. With the term metacognition we characterize the process of narrating about—cognitively grounded—narratives (second-order narration) which allows the actor to get into distance from first-order narratives to put them into perspective.

We have already seen that our brains manage to navigate us through our daily businesses without bothering consciousness too frequently. It is only when the daily routines fail that a task is delegated to consciousness. Or in the language of predictive-brain theories, if prediction errors at ‘lower’ levels of processing are too large (Clark 2016). Even more, our brains have the tendency to unburden consciousness by habituating routines that delegate initially new but repeating experiences to ‘lower’ levels of processing. Schrödinger (2015 [1967]) probably found the most condensed formulation for this: “... *becoming is conscious, being is unconscious.*”

Narratives of Us as Naïve Realists

Most western scientists would agree that we consciously perceive reality in narrative form (Dennett 1991). Bruner (2004) writes: “*We seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of a narrative,*” and Dennett (1986) seems to agree: “*we are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behaviour [...] and we always put the best ‘faces’ on it we can. We try to make all our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our Autobiography. The chief fictional character at the centre of that autobiography is one’s self.*” Or, in the words of Sacks (1985): “*Each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative, this narrative is us.’*”

Narratives are by definition social in nature (see Candlish and Wrisley (2014) for a survey of the so-called private-language debate), which implies that there is no sharp divide between the narrative self and society. We construct our narrative selves from the narrative material that surrounds us. This refers to the specific language with its syntax and semantic as well as to the existing narratives that the society uses as sense-making devices. These narratives are the quarry from which we serve ourselves when we try to make sense of the world and our position in it.

The way we develop narratives is complex. The default mode seems to be *confabulation*, i.e. a tendency to arrange arguments in a way as to serve our interests and to be consistent with our *gut*, our affective perception of a situation (Dennett 1991, Hirstein 2005). Despite the fact that there is very little theoretical evidence supporting the *correspondence theory of truth* (an isomorphism between a narrative statement about reality and “the real world”), most humans are *naïve realists* by default (Lieberman et.al. 2011). Indeed, it is hard to argue against this position because the illusion that we see the world objectively is such a powerful one, and it applies to objects like mountains and trees in the same way as to mere conventions like nations and races (Keltner and Robinson 1993). If the narratives that we construct are sense-making devices that follow broadly the logic of adaptability, we can better understand the tendency to confabulate. And this tendency becomes more pronounced if one or more of the following three conditions are met.

First, if there is a large temporal delay between the truth and falsity of our narratives and the implied consequences we do not get immediately punished for our wrong narrative perception of reality. If I deny the existence of a venomous snake on the street in front of me, my genetic experiment may soon be over. But if one denies anthropogenic climate change, nothing bad happens in the short run. It may have even negative short-run consequences if one accepts it because one may have to change behavior.

Second, humans are social beings, and their survival depends on their membership to and position in a social group. In evolutionary times, it was close to a death penalty if someone was casted out of the group, which explains the marked tendency for conformity and the acceptance of group norms. There is the potential for a tradeoff: if a group norm exists that denies the existence of venomous snakes on streets, it is not clear what is worse, subjugating to the group norm and taking the risk of being bitten by the snake or breaking with the group norm with all the potential consequences regarding group status and membership. And if the “truth rent” is not paid out immediately but with a long temporal delay (like with climate change), the balance is tipped even more into the direction of conforming to group norms even if they are dysfunctional.

Third, things get even muddier when we focus on social conventions. According to Searle (2010), social conventions have a subjective ontology. They exist if people agree that they exist, and they do not exist otherwise. They come into existence by the mutual acceptance of their underlying narratives. The truth of social conventions shimmers from the beginning, today’s lie can be tomorrow’s truth and *vice versa*. Hence, there is an even stronger tendency to bow to group norms. Consequently, narrative form blurs the line between individual and society. The narrative model of the self is influenced by the narratives that exist in society and vice versa.

The Role of Self-Narratives

Self-narratives are of crucial importance for cognitive processes since they guarantee a method of incongruent framing that brings the continuity of conscious sensory impressions into a simplified ordering. It is a model of the self, the world, and the place of the self in this world (McAdams 2008). The framing is incongruent because it consists of a multitude of contingent 'selflets' that need not be consistent with each other. My narrative self in my role as father can differ from my narrative self as professor, member of a party or club, etc., and the self-narratives can be fluid and inconsistent over time as well. A self-narrative is a story that has to be told to someone, be it an actual group, be it an imagined group of listeners, and it has to be successful in the sense that it depends on the benevolent reception of this group, which implies, of course, that group-specific self-narratives have a tendency to subdue to actual or imagined group norms about the ways one has to lead one's life (McAdams 2008).

The inconsistencies and contradictions between and the fluidity of the selves is not problematic as long as they do not explicitly clash or lead to a situation of existential crisis. A crisis is always a crisis of the narrative-self because it shows that the narrative sense-making device does not work and has therefore to be changed. (Western practices of psychotherapy usually count on the ability to increase wellbeing by changing the self-narratives of the individuals.) But with the exception of these situations, human beings can live happily with gross inconsistencies in their life stories (McAdams 2006, 2008).

In short, self-narratives interact in a complex way with the social environment of the narrator. (1) The environment is an important source of the experiences of the narrator that have to be narratively processed into a (locally) coherent story. (2) They are adapted to the (imagined) expectations of the (imagined) audience. (3) They are rehearsed, modified, modulated and reframed in a way that they gradually replace memories and experiences. The affective significance of the experiences is clarified and modified in this process. (4) They are assembled from a stock of culturally transmitted narrative elements.

Cognition and Affection

With respect to the previous section on affections, it is important to note that affective and cognitive experiences of the world are not independent from each other. It is not only that feelings are expressed in language and carry a bag of exformative and narrative content (Norretranders 1998). It is rather that the affective experience of the world influences the stories we tell ourselves (about ourselves) and that the stories we tell ourselves influence our affective experience (Smith 2015), and ultimately our health. We will give an example for each causal mechanism:

Damasio's (1994) Iowa gambling task is a good example for the process of *confabulation*. When subjects were asked why they have unconsciously changed their behavior before they had an awareness of the biased stacks of cards, they gave all kinds of explanations, none of them touching upon the working of their unconscious, emotional brain to prevent losses. The same happens when, for example, a person had a frightening experience with a dog in her childhood that left an emotional memory that is associated with a specific kind of street. If today, 30 years later, she happens to live in a different city with a similar street, she might unconsciously avoid walking through it. If you ask this person for reasons, she will tell you everything but not that this is a long-term consequence of her frightening experience in childhood. The emotional landscape inherited from past experiences shape the narrative self, but the stories told cannot reach to the ground because the ground is unconscious in this sense; we are necessarily strangers to ourselves.

Advertising and marketing are good examples to illustrate the effects of narratives on health and wellbeing. Marketing campaigns for products develop narratives that offer identities that suggest that a specific ideal image can be transferred from the product to the person consuming it. Levant et. al. (2015) show that there exists a positive association between the consumption of energy drinks like Monster or Red Bull, a specific idea of masculinity, and sleep disorder. This association had a negative correlation with age and was restricted to white males (it was a US study). The authors interpret their findings as further evidence for the potential negative

health effects of marketing campaigns that appeal to stereotypical (narrative) gender identities, especially throughout the formative years of adolescence.

A study that focuses on the relationship between male narrative role models and health is only the tip of the iceberg. There is extensive support for the existence of a stable relationship between advertising and media consumption on the one and subjective wellbeing and health on the other side. In a meta-study on the relationship between eating disorders and media consumption, Spettigue and Henderson (2004) found that the media develop and communicate a model of femininity that leads to unrealistic and dysfunctional normative ideals about beauty and slenderness that make women suffer and ultimately sick. The general challenge for such campaigns is to credibly communicate the following message: (1) physical appearance is important, (2) the individual human being is deficient according to the ideal standard, and (3) the consumption of specific products can (partly and temporarily) solve the problem (Wolf 1990, Kilbourne 1994, Thomsen, McCoy und Williams, 2001). From the point of view of affective experience it is crucial to establish a standard of normality that most people cannot fulfill: the narratives are narratives of deficiency, and consumption is a way out of this: the state of normality becomes what psychologists call 'normative discontent' (Oliver-Pyatt, 2003): suffering. Most studies that reliably show this fact predate the internet age. They found a key role of fashion magazines. Levine and Smolak (1993) found that 83% of all adolescent girls in the US read those journals for an average of 4.3 hours per week. These journals had a key role for the formation of identities of teenage girls (gender role, values). Kilbourne (1994) asked 11 to 17-year-old girls what they would wish if they had a wish for free and found that the most frequent wish was permanent loss of weight. The question is, of course whether the media bring out something that was already there or if they are in part responsible for these narratives. A natural experiment to test these hypotheses was the introduction of TV on Fiji islands. were able to show that adolescent girls developed significantly higher rates of eating disorders after the introduction of TV, other studies show similar effects (,)).

What these studies these and other studies (e.g. Kilbourne 1994, Stice et. al. 1994, Stice and Shaw 1994, Arnett 1995, Thomsen et al. 2001, Becker et. al. 2002; Utter et.al. 2003) show is that the socially dominant self-narratives have an impact on individual self-narratives, and that these narratives have an impact on subjective wellbeing as well as health. This relationship illustrates: To the extent that self-narratives influence behavior, they also influence 'preferences.' But even if behavior would remain unaltered, different self-narratives can have different consequences for subjective wellbeing. The stories that we listen to can be nourishing or toxic in the same way as physical food can be nourishing or toxic. Communication is much more than just information transmission: "*What defines plausibility is the formal principle of respect for the norm, that is, the existence of a relation of implication between the particular conduct attributed to a given character, and a given, general, received and implicit maxim [...]. To understand the behavior of a character (for example), is to be able to refer it back to an approved maxim, and this reference is perceived as a demonstration of cause and effect.*" (Genette, as quoted by Miller 1981).

Societal Narratives and Symbolic Power

Narratives are 'out there' in the social world and together establish what we call a *doxa*, certain ideas that we simply take for granted. This *doxa* remains invisible to most of us as long as its normative validity is not scrutinized: it has normative power because reality and perceived reality are seen as one. And the fact that these stories become an important part of one's conscious self over time has a stabilizing effect for the dominant culture: Scrutinizing and criticizing the stories necessarily implies that the conscious self is criticized as well, and one is risking status loss in or exclusion from the group. But being able to criticize one's conscious narrative-self requires that it is in principle understood that it is culture-dependent and to a certain extent arbitrary because they are conventions in the sense of Searle (2010). This runs counter to what we will describe below as *naïve realism*. It is not surprising that critique of the dominant self-narratives often comes from the fringes where people feel alienated if they try adapting the ready-made identities of mainstream culture.

This is exactly the reason why the narrative-selves always reflect and stabilize the distribution of power within a society. As many sociologists have pointed out, the concept of gender is an example for overarching narratives of a society and so is 'nationality,' 'race,' or 'class' are other powerful classifications. The effects of the individual embodiment of narratives on the individual has been analyzed by Bourdieu (1989), for example, who coined the terms *symbolic power*, *capital*, and *violence* to be able to trace the societal effects of narrative conventions. According to Bourdieu, symbolic power is "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling."

Three aspects are important to note: *Firstly*, narratives are not limited to cognitive processes but can also have a rather strong affective component. As such, *secondly*, narratives deeply embody themselves physically and shape the affective landscapes over time. Thompson (1991) puts it this way: "It is because the body has become a repository of ingrained dispositions that certain actions, certain ways of behaving and responding, seem altogether natural. Bourdieu speaks here of a bodily or corporeal 'hexis,' by which he means a certain durable organization of one's body and of its deployment in the world. 'Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition. A durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.'" And *thirdly*, narratives are communicated via language but are they are not limited to this specific and powerful form of communication. Indeed, symbolic power is represented and communicated through various cultural practices, including certain institutions, as we will argue below. Bourdieu thinks of this process as unplanned, self-emergent: "[L]egitimation of the social world is not, as some believe, the product of a deliberate and purposive action of propaganda or symbolic imposition; it results, rather, from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident" (Bourdieu 1989).

The Problem with Language

In traditional sociology in general and in economics in particular language has the status of a mean (communicating information) to a certain end (e.g. stabilizing social relations). In Williamson's (2000) account of transaction-cost economics, for example, language and narratives have the character of an *institution*. Narratives as social conventions shape perceptions of reality as well as of the self, and thereby action and behavior. But this observation shows that another line that is crucial in mainstream (institutional) economics and other classical social theories gets blurred as well. And this is the line between means and ends.

Economics assumes that institutions are means to an end that is defined by the preferences of the individuals. This clear-cut distinction makes it also possible to clearly distinguish between instrumental rationality (which is what economics is about) and value rationality (which is beyond economical calculation). However, if narratives influence behavior *and* establish the self, there is no longer a meaningful means-ends distinction. The narrative self becomes the entity from which narrations *as* institutions are evaluated and part of the 'embodied' institution itself. Bruner (2004) highlighted the problems that result from this reflexivity: "[T]he reflexivity of self-narrative poses problems of a deep and serious order --problems beyond those of verification, beyond the issue of indeterminacy (that the very telling of the self-story distorts what we have in mind to tell), beyond 'rationalization.' [...] Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's culture. Indeed, one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life. [...] I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. [...] [E]ventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-

build the very 'events' of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variants of the cultures canonical forms."

5. Affection and Cognition: From Individual to Social Theory

In the previous sections, we have elaborated on an individual theory of human perception, wellbeing, and behavior that is grounded on insights from particularly evolutionary psychology, psychology, neuroscience, narratology, and cognitive psychology. The picture that becomes visible is of a human self that is inseparable from its culture, history, and environment more generally. Neither feelings nor cognitions nor (self-) narratives are independent of "culture." Wherever one is looking for a stable core of the "self," one finds embodied culture; the line between individual and environment, individual and society is blurred. We now want to and have to go one step further in extending this "micro theory" toward a more comprehensive *social theory*, more precisely a *cultural* theory of interaction. To do so, we borrow some basic ideas from Max Weber's sociology by introducing analytical levels beyond the micro level of the individual. This methodological approach allows it to focus on neglected albeit important concepts for the social sciences and ethics: the temporal and social dynamics of body-brains, affective experiences, and narratives.

Traditional Sociology

In a nutshell, a Weberian social theory is conceptualized as a multi-level approach that allows to link different levels of analysis, especially between individual actions, social interactions, and institutional settings that are revealed by patterns of actions and interactions but that are also reflected and embodied in affective and narrative perceptions by the individuals. It can be characterized as an interpretative or social-constructivist approach that marks a fundamental difference in perspective between scholars in their role as observers on the one hand and the actors they observe on the other. As Alfred Schütz (1972/1960, p. 6; our translation) wrote, we should not merely ask "*what the meaning of the social world is to the social scientist,*" but what it means to "*the ones who actually act in this world.*" Weber wanted to overcome the dichotomy between the interpretation of actions (in the humanities) and the explanation of social phenomena (in the sciences) by establishing in his case sociology as "*a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences*" (Weber 1968, p. 4; original: Weber 1980/1921, p.1).

Weber's systematic approach towards a cultural theory is illustrated in Figure 1.

We want to highlight three aspects of Weber's methodological approach: *Firstly*, the figure shows the primary relationship between actions, social relations (or interactions), and orders (or institutions) that Weber outlines as paragraphs two to five in "*Basic Sociological Terms*" (Weber 1968, p. 3-62). Actions (§2) and institutions (§4 and §5) are recursively connected. Institutions guide actions as well as, *vice versa*, actions bring about, stabilize or destabilize institutions. Institutions can be institutionalized as well as deinstitutionalized and being replaced by other institutions. Social relations or interactions between individuals (§3) are important to link actions and institutions.

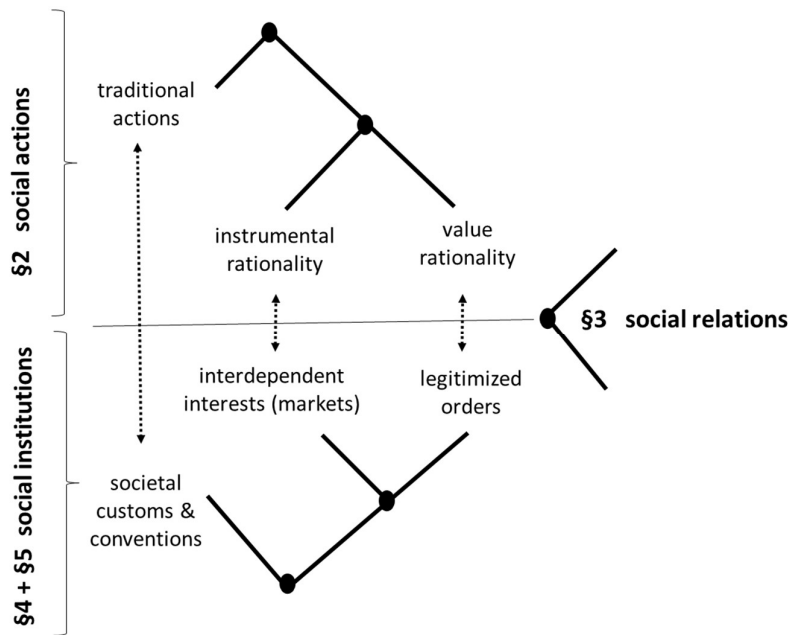


Figure 1: Weber in a Nutshell
(based on Schluchter 1998, p. 355; our translation)

Secondly, the figure displays instrumental rationality and value rationality as two distinct forms of action that are not subtypes of the respective other type but that are both modes of action *sui generis*. Weber argues that we mainly act according to routines (traditional action). This “automatic mode” is very often sufficient to guide actions. If this is not the case, if e.g. we are facing new and unfamiliar situations, actors activate cognitive modes of consideration. Instrumental rationality and value rationality represent the most important types of reflexivity. Not merely for the sake of completeness, we should add that Max Weber mentions a fourth type of action that he calls “affective actions” (Weber 1968, p. 25). Affective actions are anchored in the emotional “landscape” of a person and are perceived as irrational by Weber. We will come back to this point below.

Thirdly, the figure sketches the correspondence between certain types of actions and certain types of institutions. Traditional actions refer to societal customs and conventions, instrumental rationality corresponds to orders with interdependent interests (typically markets), and value rationality is related to legitimized orders in society. Again, and similar to actions, these ideal types are not dependent on each other; instead, each of them is a type *sui generis*.

Affective-Reflective Cognition versus Dual-Process Theories

The implications of Weber’s social theory not only depend on the structural concepts of the theory but also on the underlying anthropology. Even if Weber avoids this term, his remarks on the different forms of rationalities implicitly pin down such anthropology, and it is *prima facie* unclear whether it is a convincing one. At this point, the research condensed into the dynamic multi-level adaption model from Sections 2-4 comes into play. It can play two different roles. The first one would be to scrutinize the implicit anthropological premises and their normative perception. One could, for example, elaborate on Weber’s type of “affective actions” confronting it with what we know about affects, habits, perception, and action (AS mode) and the relationship to the cognitive-narrative side of human existence (RC mode). This line of argumentation would be an “add-on” to traditional sociological thinking as visualized through the light grey area in Figure 2.

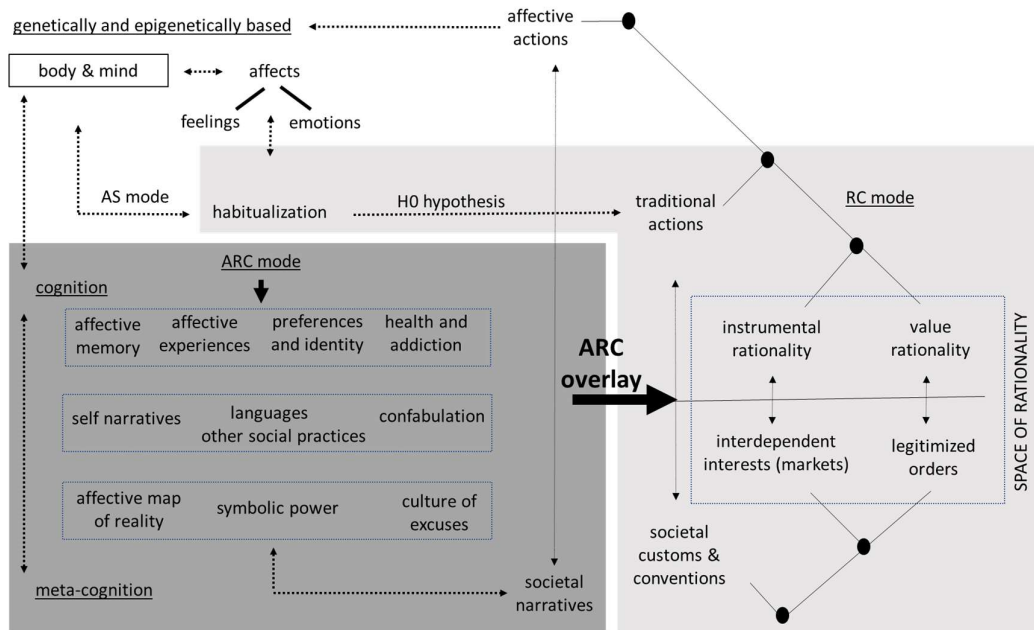


Figure 2: Affective-Reflective Cognition Processes and the Traditional Social Sciences

The second line of argumentation is more radical. Contrary to, for example, the assumption of the popular dual-process theories of mind and brain (see for example Kahnemann 2011 and Greene 2013) the findings summarized in Sections 2-4 show that AS and RC modes are dynamic and deeply interwoven and dependent on culture and society, which scrutinizes the usefulness of this model as a general positive as well as normative metaphor (dual-process models are at least epistemically normative, and it is unclear if the epistemic normativity of the model reaches through to the level of ethical normativity). The findings from Sections 2-4 show that the RC-mode is only an idealization (or an *ideal type*) and that RC-processes are more than purely ‘cognitivist’ in the sense that it is restricted to the language, stories, models, and theories people use as sense-making devices for their existence and behavior. RC-processes ‘embody’ themselves down to the epigenetic level by influencing the metabolic processes and the affective experiences of his perceived reality. The dark-grey area in Figure 2 illustrates these “affective-reflective cognition” processes (ARC-mode) of human action. If we take the “interwovenness” of affect, cognition, and society/culture seriously, the consequences cannot be easily integrated into classical social theories. It rather requires a methodologically approach that (1) makes the interwovenness an integral part of the analysis and (2) tackles the normative-ethical issues that exist for ethics based on stable and distinguishable concepts of the individual.

The following arguments suggest why broadening the perspective is important and hints towards some methodological implications:

Affective Experiences (AE): *Firstly*, affective experiences and affective memories lead to an affective map of reality that is crucial for both, the affective and the cognitive experience of reality, and the action-guiding H0-hypotheses (in the sense of the predictive-coding model mentioned above) of the individual. The affective processes can be recognized and understood only in very limited ways but happen mostly subconsciously. On the contrary, it can be expected that emotions and behaviors, once brought to the attention of the individual, will be “explained” by confabulating a (good enough) convincing story (which is consistent with the implications of the predictive-coding model).

Embodied Self-Narratives (ENS): *Secondly*, the ARC mode shows no clear distinction between individual, society, and non-social elements of the environment. Over time, the affective and

narrative experience of reality and the ‘self’ intermingle with the cultural practices and environmental demands imposed on the individual. In this sense, even mere social conventions embody themselves over time and in this sense become ontologically objective.

Mismatch (MM): *Thirdly*, the dynamic adaption process creates room for dysfunctional adaptations into the relevant environments (mismatches). This may be a result of a non-representativeness of individual experiences, mal-adaptive calibrations, or a dynamic environment that changes more rapidly than the calibration and learning processes. The potential for mismatches calls the subjectivist or relativist view that takes individual ‘preferences’ as the only reliable source of individual interest and wellbeing into serious question.

Symbolic Power (SP): *Fourthly*, the conscious process of narration in the ARC mode is itself part of the adaption process and therefore highly subjective and context- as well as culture-dependent. In addition, the tendency to confabulate calls the objectivity of narratives as sense-making devices into question and has also implications for the perception of the functioning and the role of agreement in discourses, for example because language itself is a source of symbolic power for at least two reasons, first because of the ‘encapsulated’ ideas of reality and social order (the *doxa*), and second because of differences in literacy between participants of a discourse.

Ineffability (IE): Even worse, *fifthly*, the discussion about the relationship between emotions and feelings points towards the potential ineffability of experiences by means of language, which, for example, potentially also limits the role of rational discourse.

To summarize, if one asks in the tradition of Schütz what the social world means to “*the ones who actually act in this world*,” there is no way around the interwovenness of affects, narratives, and society/culture. In this respect, if one takes the surprisingly coherent picture that emerges from the findings summarized in Sections 2-4 seriously, a positive and normative social theory becomes necessary that takes the interwovenness seriously and is thereby qualitatively different from traditional social theories. In other words, the light grey area in Figure 2 is subject to scrutiny and negotiation.

6. The Limits of Traditional Normative Ethics: The Case of Discourse Ethics

In this section, we illustrate the potential normative consequences of the preceding sections with the example of Discourse Ethics.

While ethics represents an extremely diverse field of different schools of thought, it is safe to say that most ethical theories are strongly grounded on the idea of rationality and a cognitivist account of reason. Affects (or the “passions,” as they are often called in philosophy) play a role, however, they are merely relevant to motivate acts (Hume) or as the ends of the moral endeavor (Bentham). Modern normative Ethics is deeply cognitivist. Let us briefly look at a modern “take” on the Kantian tradition of ethical reasoning, that is, Discourse Ethics. We will use this class of theories to illustrate potential normative shortcomings of this approach that only get into view if one looks them from the point of view of the findings from Sections 2-4. We will then briefly sketch how to conceptualize normative ethics that takes these findings into consideration.

Habermas’ Take on Ethics

In the Habermasian version of Discourse Ethics (Habermas 1984; 1987), moral norms are established by first invoking the moral principle of open debate among equal citizens in which fair processes of deliberation that takes place in a power-free realm. It is a process-oriented approach towards ethics that does not primarily focus on specific moral norms, but on the procedures that yield normative principles. Moral principles emerge from the fair interaction of citizens in a discourse. Habermas and others are interested in the question: How can we organize a society that enables open discourse and open criticism as the precondition for just practices (moral norms)?

With respect to deliberations and open discourses, another key component of Habermas' concept comes into play: "communicative actions" as opposed to strategic actions. This is in a way reminiscent of Weber's differentiation between value and instrumental rationality, but within the field of ethics. Strategic actions, Habermas argues, are characterized by power that structures the process of negotiations between the involved parties. On the contrary, "ideal communication communities" base their interactions on a fair non-hierarchical (*herrschaftsfrei*) discourse. Participants in such a discourse do not negotiate, they deliberate; they give (good) *normative reasons*.

Habermas argues that nobody can seriously enter an argumentation if he or she does not assume the principle of public access, equal participation, integrity, and so on. In other words, an argumentation is by definition characterized by the force for the better argument, which takes place according to certain rules. Denying the discourses' norms results in a "performative contradiction" by the actor. Note that this is a *counterfactual* approach (thus not an empirical one) since it can be assumed that actual discourses can never fully fulfill the assumed principle of public access, equal participation, etc. From the moral point of view of Discourse Ethics, it is of foremost importance to neutralize power-relations and transform them into fair discourses. As illustrated in Figure 3, this is the "*space of reasons*," closely related to the "*space of rationality*" in Weber's sociology.

From a systematic point of view, the traditional concept of Discourse Ethics stands on two pillars, an ideal form of discourse *D* and a principle of mutual recognition *MR*. The idea that an argumentatively disciplined discourse necessarily involves conceptually normative presuppositions, some of which having recognizably normative content in the form of moral requirements for which validity must be universally claimed and cannot sensibly be scrutinized. This concept of a discourse is conceptualized as a net of interrelated *speech acts* formulated in *language*. We call this concept *D_L*.

The scope of these moral requirements encompasses all persons who are reason-responsive agents and who are or could be communicatively connected via the argumentative discourse. The requirements are recognizably moral in the sense that by being connected in this way we *reciprocally expect* that we all ought to take seriously how the consequences of our argumentative acts affect other reason-responsive agents for their good or ill in their capacity as reason-responsive agents (*MR*).

The Limits of Language

In light of the above-mentioned implications from Sections 2-4 with respect to the interwovenness of language, the traditional concept of Discourse Ethics $DE_L = (D_L, MR)$ seems to be in a normatively relevant way too limited. The reliance of *D_L* on language, narratives, and rationality is at odds with what we know about how people make use of discourses and how they are incorporated into their physical existence. In addition, different languages lead to different realities, which has important intercultural as well as intra-cultural implications.

With respect to intercultural differences, Nisbett (2003) argues that "*European thought rests on the assumption that the behavior of objects -- physical, animal, and human -- can be understood in terms of straightforward rules. Westerners have a strong interest in categorization, which helps them to know what rules to apply to the objects in question, and formal logic plays a role in problem solving. East Asians, in contrast, attend to objects in their broad context. The world seems more complex to Asians than to Westerners, and understanding events always requires consideration of a host of factors that operate in relation to one another in no simple deterministic way. Formal logic plays little role in problem solving. In fact, the person who is too concerned with logic may be considered immature. [...] [T]he social structure and sense of self that are characteristic of Easterners and Westerners seem to fit hand in glove with their respective belief system and cognitive processes. [...] [D]ifferences in people's attitudes and beliefs, and even their values and preferences, might not be a matter merely of different inputs and teachings, but rather an inevitable consequence of using different tools to understand the world. [...] Westerners and Asians literally see different worlds.*"

With respect to intra-cultural differences, differences in literacy, the symbolic power that is embedded within language and narratives are obstacles for overcoming hierarchies in discourses. The point that one can reach as long as one sticks to the narrative form of Discourse Ethics DE_L is an unnecessarily far cry from the non-hierarchical “point from nowhere” the theory envisions. The findings from Sections 2-4 rather suggest that language and narrative can be an obstacle on the way towards a better understanding of the individual self as well as the other; of what we owe to ourselves and what we owe to others.

But the question is, of course, whether a generalized form of discourse ethics is possible, whether the concept necessarily has to rely on a concept of a discourse in the sense of D_L (as the uttering of speech acts) to preserve its normative appeal, or whether the idea of a discourse can be replaced by some generalized form of “discourse” that respects the specific aspects of human perception and decision making that are illustrated by the dynamic multi-level decision model discussed in the former section (affective experiences (AE), embodied self-narratives (ENS), mismatch (MM), symbolic power (SP), and ineffability (IE)).

7. Cultural Ethics: A Conceptual Framework

To overcome the above-mentioned limitations of DE_L , we suggest incorporating cultural *practices* into normative ethics that are not necessarily restricted to speech acts. We use the term “cultural ethics” (CE_P) as a generic name for this endeavor. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p. 181) define culture as follows: “*culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.*” In line with this definition but in more analytical tradition, Reckwitz (2000, p. 74-75) distinguishes between three distinct cultural “layers.” Culture encompasses (1) social practices, habits, or customs as embodied and empirically observable ways of living; (2) normative ideas and premises that implicitly or explicitly support the actions of actors and/or make other forms of action less likely; (3) “artificial” products resulting of both, concrete actions as well as normative ideas, such as the law or any kind of institution as a mutually recognized patterned forms of behavior.

Based on this understanding of culture, CE_P broadens DE_L by recognizing the limited role of language in the pursuit of finding common moral ground. Every discourse is a cultural practice but not all cultural practices are discourses in the sense of CE_P . The fact that humans embody culture in very profound ways suggests that one needs a “thicker” (Williams 1985, Putnam 2003) concept of communication (from Latin *communicare*, “to share, join, unite”), understanding (from Old English, “stand in the midst of, be close to”), comprehension (from Latin *comprehendere*, “to take together, to unite”), and appreciation (from Latin *appretiare*, “estimate the quality of”) that allows addressing two problems. Firstly, the endogeneity problem that results from the embodiment of cultural conventions into important aspects of the “self” points towards the necessary limitations of the concept of narrativity in reaching an ethical neutral ground. Secondly, the normatively relevant narrowness of language-based discourses D_L that has to come to grips with the fact that people differ with respect to their ability to express themselves verbally as well as nonverbally and that different languages induce different “realities.”

In short, we denote the more general set of practices P , $D_L \subset P$, that does not necessarily rely of the uttering of speech acts. Given that we take MR as a necessary condition for any ethical theory, this gives rise to a thick concept of cultural ethics $CE_P = (P, MR)$.

Space of Resonance

A first important consequence of this conceptualization is the emergence of what we call a “*space of resonance*” in which actors interact with each other to find common moral ground.

The concept of a space of resonance, *firstly*, opens normative ethics to incorporate the potentially normatively relevant anthropological dimensions *AE*, *ENS*, *MM*, *SP*, and *IE*. And by doing so, *secondly*, opens the normative sphere towards non-narrative forms of expression and experience that potentially allow the creation of an awareness and the annihilation of for example normatively relevant aspects of *AE*, *ENS*, *MM*, *SP*, and *IE*, like symbolic power embedded in language that encapsulates ideas of order and stratification as parts of the (conventional) social ontology. The creation of an awareness of these and other forms of normatively relevant practices in the space of resonance can come in narrative form, for example fueled by research in the social and natural sciences (this paper is an example) but does not have to. In this sense, science has the function of creating self-awareness that scrutinizes the implicit social *normality* that necessarily establishes itself within and through language and other cultural practices and that leverages itself onto potentially ethically relevant forms of implicit *normativity*.

Internal versus External Critique

The second consequence of moving from *DE_L* to *CE_P* concerns the point of departure for normative analysis. In a Kantian as well as in a Habermasian tradition of Discourse Ethics, for example, the starting point of normative ethics is a “moral point of view” justified by rational, and implicitly narrative considerations (by philosophers?) and represented by certain moral principles. These approaches allow confronting the “real world” with the respective moral principle. This creates the illusion of an external, impartial standpoint as indicated by the arrow in the upper left of Figure 3. These thought experiments, however, can only create an external standpoint that remains internal to the narrative conventions given by language games and narration-internal concepts of rationality. As we have argued above, this concept is ill-suited to critically reflect exactly those dimensions of ethically relevant power that are engrained within these linguistic conventions. They take as a tool what rather has to be fixed.

In contrast, we suggest a concept of normative ethics that is grounded in cultural practices and that avoids any “hyper-empirical” (from Greek *hyper*, „over, beyond, overmuch, above measure,“) standpoints (such as the “categorical imperative” by Kant or the “ideal speech situation” in discourse ethics). In fact, *CE_P* has its point of departure in specific cultural practices of the everyday life that allows to take, scrutinize, and develop a “view from within,” which makes it a practice of (culture-internal) critique that overcomes the narrow bounds of a Habermasian discourse.

What we have done so far can be summarized as follows. We have (1) broadened the concept of an “ideal communication community,” (2) introduced and illustrated the concept of a “space of resonance,” and (3) suggested a procedure that starts from within the history-contingent practices with the purpose to create an awareness of the implicit normativity of these practices and – be overcoming them – reaching common moral ground. This process within a space of resonance also includes *MR*, which can apply to different groups of ethical subjects. *MR* as a principle is indispensable, but the *reach* of this principle can still be unclear.

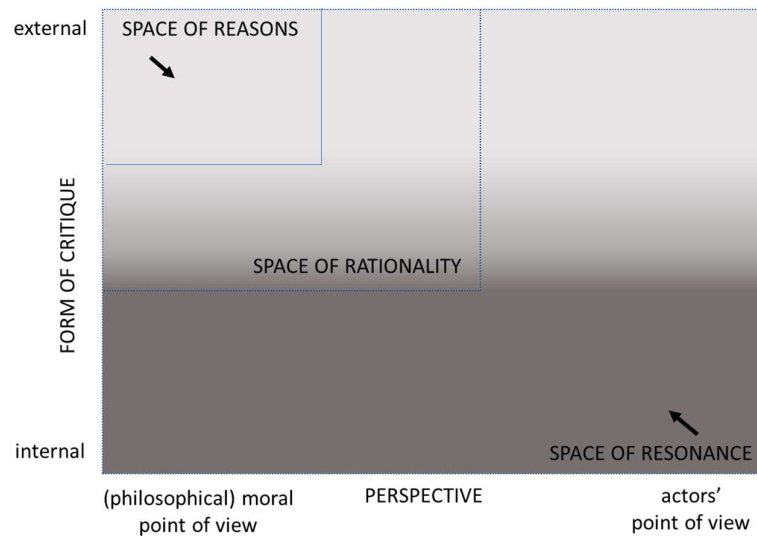


Figure 3: *Space of Reasons, Space of Rationality, Space of Resonance*

Moral Vibrancy

We can now further strengthen the normative perspective by introducing the concept of *moral vibrancy* (MV) as a complementary normative concept. It borrows from and takes seriously what Schatzki (2010, p. 66) describes as the “*hanging-together of human lives*” by making its awareness part of the space of resonance. Subjects inter-act with each other and their “environments” and are connected in various ways that blur any simple dividing line between “self” and “other”, “subject” and “object.” This hanging-togetherness is not only a result of the biological need for cooperation. It is rather the implication of shared language and other forms of social interaction and cultural practices, structured by formal or informal institutions as well as cultural practices are embodied in each and every subject.

The notion *moral vibrancy* describes a specific form of interaction within the spaces of resonance by referring to moral practices, characterized by the principle of mutual recognition (see above). Moral vibrancy *MV* can be determined according to different *degrees* of its occurrence that could be conceptualized by means of an ordinal situational measure y , $y \in [0,1]$ that induces a partial ordering, with the interpretation that situation 1 is less morally vibrant than situation 2 if and only if $y_1 < y_2$. At the same time, the concept of moral vibrancy captures the idea that within a space of resonance, interactions are dynamic, and that moral practices can become self-enforcing but also self-destroying and that morally supportive spaces of resonance support a virtuous circle of mutual flourishing and understanding.

Moral Inquiries

An integral cognitive and narrative aspect of moral vibrancy that is reminiscent of D_L is the promotion of justification discourses characterized by the very practical and everyday-life actions of “taking and giving of reasons.” We call this aspect “space of responses,” see also Figure 4. It is important to note that at this point we remain within the sphere of cultural practices. Again, following Korsgaard (2003) and Wallace (1998), it is necessarily an out-reaching “view from within” that does not rest on pre-defined moral principles other than *MR* but that invites *inquiries* into the individual moral “default mode;” or as Korsgaard (2003, p. 115) has put it: it is about the “*logic of practical deliberation, a principle that is constitutive of deliberation, not a theoretical premise that is applied in practical thought.*”

But as mentioned before, moral vibrancy does not stop here but rather extends towards non-narrative cultural practices. A joint walk, meal in silence, or the mindful recognition of the present moment, for example, are practices creating moral vibrancy that can have important

moral implications. This understanding of practical discourses extends beyond a Habermasian discourse D_L . While Habermas locates the ideal discourse in the space of reasons, we locate the “space of responses” in the practical context. It is only there that we can reach common ground that is not tainted by power relations, be they physical or symbolic. And it is only this kind of understanding, of being close to each other, that has the potential to solve the motivational problem prevalent in all cognitivist ethics: the more we understand and embody the understanding that we inter-are, the easier it gets to act accordingly because the tradeoffs between “self” interest and the common good cease to exist.

While the dynamic nature of the space of responses makes them—in contrast to Habermas’ concept of an “ideal discourse”—imperfect at any given point in time, at least in “Western” societies practical discourses are of immanent importance for creating a virtuous dynamic because the “taking and giving of reasons” is a key cultural practice that can be used to “get the space of resonance into moral vibration.” Moreover, it seems to be very likely that exercising practical deliberation might positively influence the recognition of (the) other(s) (Fishin’s projects on deliberative democracy are pointing in this direction; e.g. Fishkin 2013). Consequently, we assume mutual recognition MR as a process that can develop over time.

Responsibility

With the introduction of a space of responses we are now able to briefly connect our approach with the debate in moral philosophy about the concept of *responsibility*. The traditional definition of the term responsibility is based on the possibility to causally assign acts and consequences to specific actors who are then—if we presuppose an adequately chosen concept of freedom of will—seen as being morally responsible for them (Sinnott-Armstrong 2015).

The concept of Cultural Ethics that we suggest in principle shares the view, for example, with stakeholder approaches suggested in business ethics where questions of responsibility are relevant for “*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives*” (Freeman 1984, p. 46) but recognizes the limitations of the approach. Scholars have criticized this take on the concept of responsibility as being too narrow since it excludes a discussion of issues related to for example “systemic responsibility.” It is based on ontological premises regarding the linearity and additivity of causal laws that are necessary to assign and apportion responsibility. Such an ontology is, however, far from obvious. Iris Marion Young (2006, p. 116-118), for example, argues that the “liability model” of responsibility cannot always—and less and less so—be applied in modern societies because the individual sources of harm are increasingly difficult to trace (due to a more and more complex and globalized world). But more than that, with a non-linear ontology the whole concept of apportionability is no longer meaningfully defined. Consequently, Young suggests an extension of the liability model towards what she calls a “social connection model:” “*The social connection model of responsibility says that individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice because they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes. Our responsibility derives from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects. Even though we cannot trace the outcome (...) [of] our own particular actions in a direct causal chain (...) we bear responsibility because we are part of the process*” (Young 2007, 175; emphasis by us). Young also suggests certain criteria for „systemic responsibility,” which are: power, privileges, interests, and collective abilities. (Young 2006, p. 127-130).

The Belonging-Togetherness With Others

From the point of view of CE_p , the importance of the social-connection model stems from the fact that it brings together an actor perspective with a broader “systemic” perspective. (Note, that according to this approach it is not meaningful to assign responsibility to a system but that it is possible to reconstruct a systemic responsibility of actors.) However, as it stands it provides only a negative result with respect to the exclusive actor-centered approaches without fully developing the implications of non-linear ontologies for the concept of responsibility.

Schatzki's concept of the "hanging-togetherness of human lives" and Young's concept of a "belonging-togetherness with others" are similar takes on the same basic phenomenon that could be called *deep interdependency*. The importance of these developments cannot be overstated because they bring "Western" into proximity with "Eastern" social and moral theories that are less agentic, focus more on the ontological and moral implications of inter-being, and put more emphasis on the ineffability of (moral) experience (Batchelor 2015, Nisbet 1991, Slingerland 2014). In an increasingly globalized world, reaching beyond the narrow bounds of language may be a promising and maybe the only way to reach global common moral ground. From the point of view of CE_P , moral vibrancy is the glue that holds the system together. That this approach is consistent with what we have learned about the dynamic nature of human experience and wellbeing is reassuring.

To sum up, we suggest two interrelated moral principles: mutual recognition MR and moral vibrancy MV inter-being with connecting to other cultural practices $P_o = P \setminus MV$: $CE_P = ((P_o, MV), MR)$. The approach remains within the space of resonance where the space of responses plays an important but not an exclusive role. Figure 4 illustrates this idea.

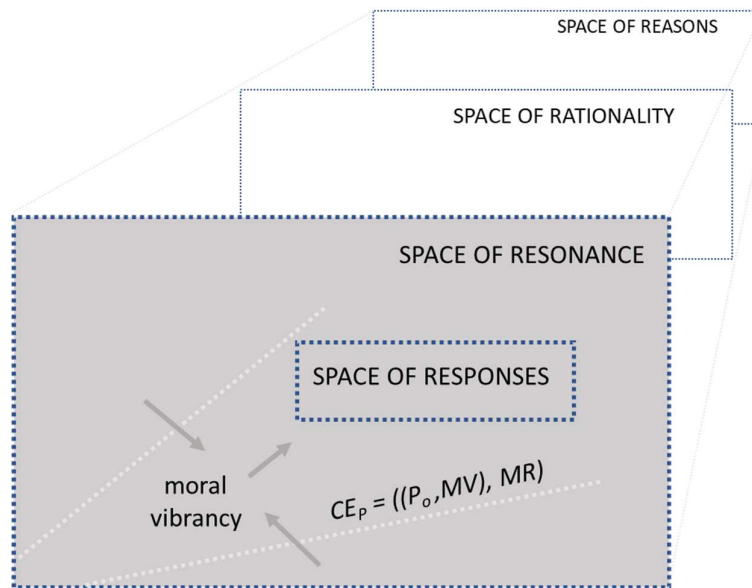


Figure 4: *Space of Resonance, Space of Responses*

There are three practical consequences that result from our analysis.

Firstly, since we are not starting with pre-defined moral principles beyond MR and MV , we do not speak of an "ideal discourse" (like in traditional discourse ethics) but, instead, of "better discourses" or "better practices" in general (which is why we have to assume that MV can be measured in an ordinal metric that imposes a partial ordering on MVs). One might argue that this is merely a weak foundation compared to the much stronger ethical requirements in traditional Discourse Ethics, for example. We think the opposite is the case since our approach fosters forms of *internal critique* and, thus, tackles normativity within cultural practices and through the actors in practice.

Secondly, getting insight into good and bad, right and wrong and the implicated moral responsibilities are not discrete events but open *processes* of understanding. They are *moral-learning processes* that build on the initial willingness to provisionally accept MR and the potential adequacy of the cultural practices PR . With increasing insight, the normative

adequacy of both, *PR* and *MR* must then be part of exactly this insight: Cultural practices must be perceived as being normatively adequate along the way of gaining moral insight.

Thirdly, the concept of cultural ethics is an invitation for empirical research, which is an unusual feature in normative ethics. Here, we suggest operating with *comparative studies* to deepen insights of cultural (moral) practices. Comparative investigations can be comparisons of (at least two) cases ($CE_{P(A)}$, $CE_{P(B)}$, ...) or items and/or historical single case analyses over a period of time ($CE_{P(t0)}$, $CE_{P(t1)}$, ...) Note, the conceptual framework of cultural ethics echoes empirical comparisons. This is especially reflected in the idea of (measuring) different degrees of moral vibrancy. The approach presented in this paper remains general and abstract. However, we are optimistic that cultural ethics can be applied with respect to various fields—in business ethics as well as other parts of the social life. The development of specific indicators to measure moral vibrancy would be necessary. On this basis, empirical research might have the potential in providing important information and insights relevant for moral learning processes of actors in practice.

Table 1 outlines the general research strategy and some consequences of our argumentation by sketching similarities and differences between DE_L and CE_P .

	Discourse Ethics (DE_L)	Cultural Ethics (CE_P)
type of ethics	procedural ethics	procedural ethics
└ as ...	└ interactional	└ interactional
└ based on ...	└ language	└ cultural practices
normative grounds	mutual recognition & ideal communication communities	(degrees of) mutual recognition & moral vibrancy
└ within spaces of ...	└ rationality & reasons	└ resonance & responses
└ via ...	└ counterfactual argumentation	└ morality within practices
└ aiming at ...	└ idealization (“ideal discourse”)	└ moral learning processes (“better practices”)
└ type of critique	└ external	└ internal
anthropology	cognitivist	affective, reflective, cognitive
└ based on ...	└ an idea of rational action (?)	└ empirical insights in human perception, wellbeing & behavior
└ ontology	└ linear	└ dynamic
└ relevance of empirical research	└ non	└ high

Table 1: Discourse Ethic and Cultural Ethics - Similarities and Differences.

8. Conclusion

If “Ought implies Can,” normative ethics should be nourished by a never perfect but open and detailed understanding of human perception, wellbeing, and behavior, the interwovenness of the “self,” the “social,” and the “environment,” and the practices that allow us to grow into moral beings. In this paper, we have developed a line of argumentation that takes findings from different fields of research as a starting point to develop a theory that links the micro- with the meso- and macro levels in order to then sketch a normative theory of cultural practices.

Traditional social sciences and traditional (Western) normative ethics are cognitivist, based on the idea of rationality, and—with respect to ethics—guided by the idea and the ideal of (rational) moral reasoning. We have scrutinized and challenged all three (closely connected) building blocks while grounding our own argumentation on empirical-informed insights that reach from evolutionary biology over neuroscience to psychology and narratology. Here, we highlight in particular the relevance of the interwovenness of affects, narratives with social practices. The main reason for why we consider this approach as being relevant is because of the view that we get on our (human) affective and narrative perception and behavior points towards ethically relevant limitations of the traditional cognitivist approach that one should be able to address. This, however, is only possible if we embed the cognitivist approach in a thicker concept of moral communication, understanding, comprehension, or appreciation.

In order to get to such a point, we have carved out the basic pillars of what we call Cultural Ethics that approaches morality “from within” the cultural practices of the people but that reaches out towards the creation of an awareness of the implicit normativity of cultural practices. Thus, we replace concepts like the “ideal discourse” with the thicker concepts we call “space of resonance” and “space of response,” and suggest two normative principles: mutual recognition and moral vibrancy. Cultural Ethics is based on the idea to create better practices by emphasizing (non-cognitivist and maybe even non-effable) moral learning processes.

9. Appendix

In this appendix we illustrate our concept by means of the example.

An important class of cultural practices whose purpose is -- among others -- the creation of an awareness of the contingency of the “default mode” of thinking and experiencing is meditation. Irrespective of the specific cultural tradition in which meditative practices are embedded (ranging from the Kabbalah and Christian Mystics over Yogic traditions of Hinduism to Tibetan and Zen Buddhism), they share two key elements that are of importance for the concept of a space of resonance (Goleman 1988): the ineffability of the meditative experience and its moral significance, usually expressed as some form of compassion. Meditative practice is seen as a way to become aware of the contingencies of one’s own existence, or in the language of Sections 2-4, the contingencies of *AE*, *ENS*, *MM*, *SP*, and *IE* with the ultimate goal (which also resonates with the different traditions of virtue ethics) to become an autonomous, compassionate being. Language is an obstacle of this way, and therefore also an obstacle on the way to reach common moral ground based on compassion: “*He who wishes to see what his mind really is must free himself of all thoughts*” (St. Nilus, as translated by Goleman (1988), S. 56). This conviction expresses itself in the most drastic form in Zen Buddhism where it is an important practice of *zazen* to work on koans with the purpose to reach *satori*, which has an ineffable moral quality: “*Here, means and ends coalesce; the posture of mindfulness is built into the meditator’s consciousness as a full awareness devoid of self-consciousness. Having experienced the impermanence of all things, that life is pain, that all forms are *ku*, empty or voidness, [the practitioner] ceases clinging to the phenomenal world yet continuous to act*” (Goleman 1988, S. 91f.) These spiritual practices are prototypical examples for what we call spaces of resonance where linguistic and non-linguistic practices all work in the same direction to – among other things – find common moral ground that can either reveal itself in epiphanic

moments or a gradual process of increasing “self”-awareness. This can perhaps best be exemplified by means of Buddhist epistemology (Batchelor 2015, p.6): “[T]he aim of Buddhist philosophy was to gain knowledge [...] by rational analysis and inference, whereas the goal of Buddhist meditation was to focus on this insight until one achieved an immediate, non-conceptual understanding. This procedure of analysis and meditation was presented as the only way to gain enlightenment about the true nature of reality and thereby liberation from ignorance that is the root cause of suffering.” This quote nicely illustrates the back-and-forth between language-based reasoning and non-conceptual insights that has the potential to cope with *NS*, *MM*, *SP*, and *IE*, and that therefore illustrates *CE*.

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