Experimental Philosophy and the Fruitfulness of Normative Concepts

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Proponents and critics of experimental philosophy have distinguished between the field's "negative" and "positive" programs.[1] The negative program has so far attracted the most attention, both in the academy and in the popular press.[2] This is perhaps not surprising, given the radical critiques of a priori philosophical methods that early papers in the negative program put forward (Weinberg 2007; Alexander and Weinberg 2007; Alexander et al. 2014). Some critics of experimental philosophy direct their objections almost exclusively at the negative program, and seem to concede some ground to what could be thought of as the positive program (Williamson 2016). Yet the positive program has not been given a robust explanation or defense.[3] If all experimental philosophy falls into either the negative or positive program, it could be that many have been inclined to think of the positive program merely in contrast to the more widely discussed negative program.

[1] Nadelhoffer and Nahmias (2007); Weinberg (2007); Alexander and Weinberg (2007); Cappelen (2012); Alexander et al. (2014); Fisher (2015); Shepherd and Justus (2015); Williamson (2016). Knobe (2016) argues that the positive-negative program distinction fails to capture much of the important work being conducted in the field. Sytsma and Livengood (2016) propose a broader taxonomy of programs (non-intuitional, negative, positive, cognitive, and descriptive) and hold that the work that Knobe points to largely falls under what they refer to as the cognitive program.
[2] See, e.g., the discussion in the Opinion Pages of the New York Times ("X-Phi's New Take on Old Problems" 2010).
[3] Of course, there are some exceptions. See, e.g., Shepherd and Justus (2015).

Knobe has argued that the positive/negative program distinction, cashed out in terms of making a positive contribution to conceptual analysis or providing evidence against the methodological assumptions of conceptual analysis, is not helpful (Knobe 2016). A broader distinction, however, can be drawn between experimental work that views itself as continuous with traditional a priori philosophical methods and that which views itself as discontinuous with or undermining those methods. The positive program, if understood in this way, encompasses much of the work that Knobe points to in showing that there are overwhelming instances of research in experimental philosophy that fall outside of what could be regarded as the negative program (or the positive program, on the understandings of these terms that he is using). Many philosophers and psychologists want to better understand how empirical work contributes to philosophical questions, and so the notion that such empirical work is continuous with traditional philosophical methods requires justification.

This paper provides an argument in support of the positive program, understood as the program of bringing empirical research to bear on philosophical questions in ways that are continuous with traditional a priori research methods. I argue that in moral psychology, in particular, philosophers must be engaged in empirical work, although my points may extend to other areas in which empirical research is conducted.[4] Many theorists hold the view that the normative concepts employed in moral and political philosophy,[5] in addition to being coherent and well motivated from a purely theoretical

[4] While I focus primarily on psychological research, the argument that I present in this paper also supports a wider role for empirical research from other social sciences in moral and political philosophy.

[5] I will remain neutral on the degree to which normative concepts employed in other fields of philosophy, such as epistemology or aesthetics, can be similarly evaluated in

perspective, should be evaluated in part by the practical role that they play. The extent to which moral and political concepts play their practical role well I will call "fruitfulness." I borrow this term from Carnap, who introduced it in putting forward a different sort of view of the practical role that scientific concepts play (Carnap 1950). The fruitfulness of moral and political concepts, on my view – and by concepts, I intend to capture also the norms, theories, and principles that fall under them, or "conceptions"[6] of concepts – can only be determined with the help of empirical investigation. In particular, determining whether or not a given moral or political concept will be fruitful in solving practical *problems* is a question that requires empirical knowledge to answer. The argument therefore provides a new justification for the "positive program" in experimental philosophy in terms of its importance to moral and political philosophy. Indeed, my view has the implication that the positive program is not merely in the service of philosophical research, but deeply continuous with the goals and tendencies of philosophical research in these areas.

1. The Fruitfulness of Normative Concepts

There's an unspoken agreement between positive program experimental philosophers and moral and political philosophers who are receptive to experimental philosophy but do not conduct empirical research. The former won't press on where the intuitions come from or the scientific explanations of where our judgments get their hold

terms of their fruitfulness. Some commentators have suggested that what I have to say here about moral and political concepts can be extended to these other fields.

[6] The distinction between concepts and conceptions is due to Rawls (1971).

if the latter don't make them say why the social sciences are important to ethics. Instead of leaving this situation as it stands, we should be confident that good explanations can be given on the second issue that are compatible with non-reductive, non-skeptical accounts of the first issue. This paper provides one such attempt at addressing the second issue, by showing that in order to evaluate the fruitfulness of moral and political concepts, research in the social sciences must be engaged with and, in my view, even conducted by philosophers.

One way into thinking about the fruitfulness of these normative concepts is to consider the purposes for which we engage in moral inquiry. Aristotle famously held that human beings have a *telos* or an end, but his remarks on the end of ethical study are often overlooked. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, he claims that we study ethics for a different reason than we study other areas of philosophy and subject matters: "We are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to *become good*" (Aristotle 1999, Book II.2, emphasis mine). The study of ethics has a point for Aristotle, to help us figure out how to live our lives in the best way, which for him is the life of virtue. I mention this remark not because I wish to defend Aristotelian virtue ethics, but because we can see what is deeply correct about Aristotle's general claim while expanding the range of purposes that moral and political concepts might have.

Normative concepts help us to live together with other human beings by aiding us in coordinating our behavior and cooperating with one another (Kitcher 2014). Working in moral and political philosophy, we are developing on a pre-existing tapestry of norms, theories, and principles, which sometimes cluster around a particular concept, and that have helped us to avoid conflict and inefficiency better than we would have without

them.[7] Of course, some theorists see moral and political concepts as analogous to any other theoretical concepts,[8] and view the practical role that they might play as extrinsic to any evaluations we might make of them. I will address this view later. First, I want to point out a number of ways in which moral and political concepts can be evaluated in terms of their practical fruitfulness, by which I mean how well they help us to solve practical problems, problems that we inevitably face as human beings. I will often refer to norms, theories, and principles that fall under a concept, what John Rawls (1971/rev. 1999) referred to as "conceptions" of concepts, because these are typically the items that are evaluated using practical criteria.

Starting with the view that normative concepts are fruitful to the extent that they help us to solve practical problems, a number of roles can be seen for these concepts and the norms, theories, and principles falling under them in addressing practical problems. To understand which normative concepts can help us to solve the practical problems that they are supposed to, notably, empirical facts come into play. These facts include: 1) how people will act when particular norms, theories, and principles are internalized (call this "Motivation"); 2) how people will be prevented from acting when such norms, theories, and principles are internalized ("Prevention"); 3) whether when norms, theories, and principles compete with bias and other problematic such items, some are more

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[7] Garner (2007) disagrees, but the view that morality should be abolished is not widely held.

[8] It is also open to theorists to view either moral philosophy or political philosophy as tied to the practical realm while the other is purely theoretical. Of the two, such theorists may be more inclined to view political philosophy as involving practical engagement. I do not address such views in this paper. If someone did endorse this sort of view, they would accept my argument for one domain rather than the other. As I will explain below, I think there is good reason to believe that many philosophers are committed to the implications of my argument for both moral and political philosophy.

effective in "fighting back" ("Resilience"); 4) whether some norms, theories, and principles are better subjects of consensus among people with other commitments that diverge but are nonetheless consistent with good will and a desire for peaceful coexistence ("Consensus"); and 5) whether these norms, theories, and principles provide or help us to formulate more useful prescriptions than others with respect to problems that we must solve ("Guidance"). Each of these roles highlight that, at least in the normative domain, empirical facts can help us to see whether concepts can help us to solve important practical problems:

1) How people will act when such norms, theories, and principles are internalized (Motivation)

It is not uncommon for philosophers to be concerned with evaluating moral and political concepts in terms of the effects that would result from their adoption. In examining these effects, one natural question to ask is how people will act when they employ these concepts and the norms, theories, and principles that fall under them. The self-effacingness objection to consequentialism is one example of a challenge to the fruitfulness of a moral theory in terms of how the theory would motivate people to act. According to that objection, it is a strike against consequentialist moral theories that they recommend that agents not internalize consequentialism, in the sense of using a consequentialist decision procedure for action. Agents that did so would not be motivated to perform actions that meet the consequentialist's own requirement to maximize good consequences, and by this requirement it would be better, the objection

continues, if they followed their moral intuitions[9] or some other non-consequentialist guide to action. This is the sense in which consequentialism is supposed to be "self-effacing." I am not asserting that the self-effacingness objection to consequentialism is successful. Many responses have been offered to it (see, e.g., Parfit 1992). My point is that this well-known objection to consequentialism suggests that philosophers are interested in what I am referring to as the *motivational* fruitfulness of a normative concept – what human beings who have internalized the concept or the norms, theories, and principles that fall under it, will be motivated to do.[10]

Another example of a debate where the motivational force of normative concepts has been thought to matter is found in the literature on duties to the global poor. Peter Singer (1972) famously argued that we can extract stringent moral duties to help people in severe poverty in developing countries from principles of beneficence that we are committed to. Alison Jaggar (2001, 2005) and Thomas Pogge (2008) have argued, however, that while principles of beneficence also apply, more stringent duties against committing harm following from principles of justice have been violated by the affluent that make the requirement to address global poverty even stronger. Many have claimed that there will be a motivational difference between arguments that appeal to these two different types of principles because the principles of justice in question involve wrongful actions that have been committed, namely the collective imposition of an unjust global

[9] The assumption here, of course, is that they have the kinds of deontological moral intuitions that most people report. If the person in question has consequentialist moral intuitions, following those intuitions will involve acting on consequentialist principles.

[10] Using the terms mentioned earlier, consequentialism is a theory or conception of rightness. Actions are right or wrong depending solely on their consequences, and on traditional forms of consequentialism, acts are right only if they maximize good consequences. In this sense, to use terms introduced by Rawls (1971), consequentialism treats the good as prior to the right.

order and a history of violent oppression through colonialism and imperialism. These negative duties are thought by some to be more motivating than the positive duties that Singer points to, which only focus on our failing to help the global poor, morally wrong *omissions* rather than actions. It has been taken as a virtue of the negative duty arguments that they will be more motivating than the positive duty argument with respect to global poverty (Pogge 2008; Lichtenberg 2010, 2014; Lawford-Smith 2012), at least when they are accepted. On the other hand, the negative duty argument may not succeed in being more motivating because people may not find it plausible that they are harming the global poor. This may be the case in part because they wish to avoid feeling guilty about contributing to severe poverty, whereas it is easier to accept the claim that we are merely failing to help (Lichtenberg 2010). I am again not taking a stance on this debate but rather pointing to another example where the motivational fruitfulness of philosophical concepts, in this case principles of beneficence and justice as applied to a particular real-world moral problem, is thought to be relevant to a philosophical debate.

Empirical studies looking at the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in response to presenting or eliciting normative concepts can bring out the tendencies those normative concepts produce in action. This can be thought of as an "intervention-based" method. For instance, one might prime participants to think about a given problem in consequentialist terms and see if their actions in the experiment maximize some measure of good consequences. Another example would involve presenting the arguments that Singer, Jaggar, and Pogge have made regarding global poverty to different groups of participants and seeing both whether participants find them plausible and, among those who do find them plausible overall, how motivated they are to address global poverty, for

instance by donating additional money they are paid for completing the study to an effective organization working to alleviate it.[11] A non-intervention based method, by contrast, would draw out the consequences of pre-existing acceptance and internalization of particular normative items in different individuals and communities. Using this method, we might look at prior tendencies of different people towards more consequentialist or more deontological modes of ethical reasoning and how these people respond to decision-making tasks assigned to them. With respect to global poverty, we can study the donation behavior of participants who differ in whether they tend to view global poverty in terms of stringent duties of beneficence or justice and compare the motivational force of these ideas in this way, controlling for confounding factors such as political orientation, level of income, religiosity, and so on.

These are just some of the types of empirical studies that may be conducted to examine the motivational force of normative concepts. Other studies might examine the comparative or combined effects of normative concepts and appeals to emotions. Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic (2007) famously showed that the photo of a child ("Rokia") living in poverty garners significantly higher charitable donations than that photo accompanied by statistical information about other children in the same situation. Yet emotional appeals also are limited in their effectiveness by "psychic numbing," our tendency to be able to focus our concern on only one individual, even when the appeal is made to our emotions rather than rational capacities (Slovic 2007). From these two points, Slovic concludes that we must seek institutional solutions to pressing moral

[11] Luke Buckland, David Rodríguez-Arias, Carissa Véliz, and I have conducted empirical studies examining the effects of reading some of these arguments on charitable giving. See Buckland et al. (unpublished manuscript).

problems like global poverty and the general disinterest with which rich nations have approached genocides in other countries. One might also conclude, however, that we should be examining which moral norms, theories, and principles do well in combining with appeals to our emotions to generate the greatest motivational effects.[12] Hassoun, Malikov, and Lubchenco (2016) also have taken up the non-intervention based method of studying the principles that seem to best capture people's donation behavior in funding microloans to persons in developing countries. These and other examples may be furnished as possible ways of addressing the motivational effects of normative concepts when they are internalized and assessing normative concepts, in part, on this basis.

2) How people will be prevented from acting when such norms, theories, and principles are internalized (Prevention)

In addition to intervention and non-intervention based approaches to looking at the effects of normative concepts in promoting certain types of behavior, empirical research can be useful in assessing the ability of normative concepts to *prevent* harmful behaviors. Kennett and Fine (2009) survey the literature suggesting that moral judgments are not merely post hoc rationalizations (contra Haidt 2001) but can help us to regulate our behaviors prospectively. They convincingly argue that we can expect moral judgments to have prosocial effects when used in the right ways. Consider Batson's important research (see, e.g., Batson 2008) showing that people's tendencies to cheat and play unfairly in games can be inhibited by making them feel that they are being observed.

[12] Peter Singer, Paul Slovic, Daniel Västfjäll, Joshua Greene, and I have recently been conducting empirical research on these issues.

Notably, this awareness doesn't have to be conscious and may be activated by even as minimal a stimulus as a mirror or representation of a pair of eyes (see also Bateson et al. 2006; Ernest-Jones et al. 2011). Empirical research could study, for instance, whether there is a difference in the ability to suppress the tendency to cheat or act selfishly in individuals who employ either more consequentialist or deontological reasoning. The fruitfulness of a normative concept can be assessed not only by what it promotes, but also what it prevents in terms of human tendencies to act in ways that are unfair or harmful to others.

3) When some norms, theories, and principles compete with bias and other problematic such items, which are more effective in "fighting back" (Resilience)

Related to the prior point, there is the matter of pre-existing biases and attitudes that are problematic and tend to influence behavior but do not always do so. Implicit bias and stereotype threat can affect people who do not explicitly endorse the relevant attitudes.[13] Lerner and Tetlock (1999) have found that knowing that we will be accountable to others for explaining our actions typically inhibits bias and improves judgment. Kennett and Fine (2009) discuss Payne's research suggesting that we can

[13] Recent studies have questioned the extent to which both implicit bias and stereotype threat affect the kinds of behaviors thought to be affected by them in in prior research. While some of these effects have not replicated in these studies, other effects, such as the "shooter bias" effect (Correll et al. 2002), have replicated (Essien et al. 2017). There is an ongoing debate about the effects of implicit bias and stereotype threat on particular behaviors and what conclusions can be drawn from this literature for public policy. The point that I am making here relies only on the claim that any negative effects of biases grounded in social group membership on evaluations of others and oneself are worth addressing through the use of normative concepts if doing so is possible, and there is some evidence that this can be done (see Payne 2005).

inhibit the behavioral expression of bias through goal-directed processing, such as when one has a salient egalitarian goal of preventing oneself from stereotyping others (Payne 2005). Empirical methods can be used to assess whether certain normative concepts are better or worse in empowering people to resist the influence of implicit biases and other problematic attitudes.

Haslanger (2000, 2012) focuses on this potential effect of a concept in putting forward a feminist, antiracist theory of the concepts of race and gender. "At the most general level," she writes, "the task is to develop accounts of gender and race that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice" (2000, p. 36). I will discuss Haslanger's view and how what I'm calling "resilience" relates to it in Section 6.

4) Whether some norms, theories, and principles are better subjects of consensus among people with other commitments that are consistent with good will and a desire for peaceful coexistence (Consensus)

A further criterion of fruitfulness for normative concepts concerns whether or not such concepts are better able to secure consensus among people with other commitments that differ and who are at least not opposed to cooperation and coexistence. An example of the sort of research that examines the degree to which a normative concept is fruitful in this way can be found in the empirical literature on Rawls' theory of justice. Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1987) were some of the first social scientists to look at whether people placed in a situation that is meant to model Rawls' original position would select principles of justice of the kind that Rawls predicted. Strikingly, they found that their

subjects in this setup tended to endorse a restricted utilitarian principle, which allows for the maximization of utility once everyone meets a basic minimum standard, rather than the difference principle. Because this research focuses on income distributions, and not primary goods in general, their result is not strictly incompatible with Rawls' prediction. Still, this experiment provides at least suggestive evidence that a restricted utilitarian principle will achieve consensus among subjects in the original position, whereas Rawls holds that the difference principle will defeat this principle (2001, pp. 126–130). Their finding has been replicated (Lissowski et al. 1991; Bruner forthcoming). Mikhail (2007; 2011) has also sought to uncover a "universal moral grammar" that underlies the moral frameworks that all cultures possess. This fundamental layer of moral cognition may be used to derive clues regarding which normative concepts will tend to secure the most widespread agreement. Empirical methods can shed light on both the uptake[14] of normative concepts in varied individuals and how well these concepts provide a common ground for working together to solve practical problems.

5) Whether norms, theories, and principles provide or help us to formulate more useful prescriptions than others with respect to problems that we must solve (Guidance)

[14] Working largely within the framework of Carnapian explication, Pinder (forthcoming) argues that experimental philosophy can help to determine whether explicated concepts are fruitful in the sense that they can achieve uptake by "the relevant theoretical community." Although I find much to agree with in Pinder, my view is not offered within the Carnapian framework, with its emphasis on explication. It is also a commitment of my view that, rather than only achieving uptake by moral and political philosophers, ordinary people as moral agents and citizens are part of the relevant community that moral and political philosophy must be fruitful for. This commitment, I suggest throughout the paper, is not uncommon among moral and political philosophers who take the practical upshots of their views to be philosophically significant.

Many philosophers hold that a moral theory should be action guiding, or at least that being action-guiding is a strike in a moral theory's favor. For instance, a traditional objection to Aristotelian virtue ethics is that it doesn't provide us with sufficient instructions for how to respond morally to situations that we find ourselves in. Philosophers have also recently been interested in how feasibility constraints should enter into our moral and political theorizing, and whether a theory takes such constraints into account affects its action-guiding potential. As in ethics, one position in political philosophy involves the view that feasibility constraints are irrelevant to our theorizing about justice. But other philosophers have thought that, at least with some of our purposes as moral theorists, feasibility constraints should be taken into account (Southwood 2016). Part of why we should care about feasibility constraints, these philosophers think, is because we need moral and political philosophy to issue us guidance about what to do about real world moral problems. This is often how the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory is cashed out, where non-ideal theory is meant to play a role in helping us to address such problems (see, e.g., Valentini 2012). Some philosophers have argued that their theories of political justice (Rawls 1971/rev. 1999, 1980, 1993) or freedom (Pettit 1999, 2014) provide better guidance than their alternatives and that this is a mark in their favor. For Rawls, the "task" of political philosophy is "to articulate a public conception of justice that all can live with who regard their person and their relation to society in a certain way" (Rawls 1980, p. 519). His practical emphasis is sometimes even stronger, as when he claims that "though doing this may involve settling theoretical difficulties, the practical social task is primary." In addition to being the subject of an "overlapping consensus" (Rawls 1971, 1993), a

Rawlsian public conception of justice is supposed to guide citizens in developing and reforming their society's political institutions on grounds that all citizens can accept. Pettit holds that his conception of freedom as non-domination "is a challenging ideal that offers a picture of the sort of progress we should hope for…" and "…more important, it is almost unique among challenging ideals in providing a plausible unifying yardstick for measuring the level of social and political progress in any society" (Pettit 2014, xvii). He refers to this republican conception of freedom as a "GPS" and a "moral compass," and describes it as a regulative ideal for assessing and reforming societal policies and institutions. Pettit holds that from a purely theoretical perspective, it is less clear that we should prefer republican freedom to the alternative libertarian and liberal conceptions of freedom. But once we account for its superior ability to provide guidance on how to structure a society's institutions in line with the demands of justice, republican freedom is the winner among these competing conceptions of freedom.

Whether a given moral or political norm, theory, or principle provides helpful guidance concerning how to solve practical problems is an empirical fact. Studies can be designed, for instance, to see whether reflecting on people who are moral exemplars tends to lead subjects to behave more fairly than they otherwise would. There is evidence to suggest that thinking about positive exemplars from one's own social group(s) can inhibit the effects of stereotype threat (Marx and Roman 2002; McIntyre et al. 2003, 2005). Further, it may also be the case that thinking about virtuous individuals, while this may not yield a determinate answer to what to do in scenarios like those presented in the trolley problem, is generally more helpful than using the abstract, general principles of other approaches to moral theory in a variety of situations. If this were the case, it would

suggest that virtue ethics can be action guiding and perhaps have distinctive action-guiding benefits. Similarly, we may test whether the Rawlsian conception of justice helps participants to divide resources up in ways that other participants regard as fair, and whether Pettit's conception of freedom does allow persons to form consistent and plausible judgments about how to address societal injustices.

Other examples where political concepts have been thought to be more or less action guiding than alternatives are found in the literature on racial inequality and on measures of welfare. In the literature on race, it has been argued that colorblind policies do not provide good guidance on how to solve problems of racial prejudice and inequality in societies with histories of racial injustice (Boxill 1992; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Anderson 2010; Mills 2011). In the literature on welfare, it has been argued that subjective measures won't guide us to improve the welfare of the worst off because their subjective reports are often influenced by the fact that marginalized people can have harmful adaptive preferences that are the result of internalizing their oppression (Khader 2011). Further empirical study will be useful in determining what moral and political concepts best respond to these problems.

The above examples are meant to give a better sense of how empirical research on these topics either has been or could be conducted. Of course, no one experiment or set of experiments is likely to settle the question of whether a given normative concept is, in the intended sense, a fruitful one. This is a caricature of the positive program. Ethics is not reduced to opinion polling by my approach, but rather takes into account empirical data that bears on the fruitfulness of the normative concepts at hand. Notably, there will typically be a gap between the data that we need in order to know which concepts can

help us solve practical problems and the data available in a context where philosophers are not involved in conducting empirical research. I will revisit this point in Section 7.

2. Relations to Other Philosophical Views and Positions

So who would disagree with the view that I've put forward here? No philosophical view appeals to all audiences, and it would be surprising if this one were different. Certain hardcore or "robust" moral realists may hold the view that facts about solving practical problems are strictly irrelevant to the evaluation of moral norms, theories, and principles (Enoch 2011). In political philosophy, the view is sometimes expressed that feasibility considerations and other practical facts should not enter into our evaluations of theories of political justice (Cohen 2008; Estlund 2014). I will return to these views in Section 4. At this point, I want to note that while they exist and are prominent, many other prominent philosophers and positions in philosophy also have been and should be receptive to what I have said here.

I have already mentioned Aristotle's remarks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* about the distinctiveness of ethics as a field of study that has a practical purpose. It may be surprising that Kantian approaches to moral thinking, at least in the constructivist tradition, also provide an important line of support for thinking about the role of empirical research in ethics. Kant himself, of course, had some fairly dismissive things to say about moral philosophy that is not purely a priori (Kant 2012, Preface). Joshua Greene's research also purports to undermine Kantian deontology and support consequentialism (Greene et al. 2001; Singer 2005; Greene 2007), and this might be

another cause for surprise. Yet there is reason to think that the Kantian constructivist tradition can provide some very helpful insights on the relationship between moral thinking and the solution of practical problems. Korsgaard (2003) examines a distinctive trend in moral thinking that emphasizes the relationship between ethics and practical reasoning. She argues that the history of constructivist and realist moral thought is a debate over whether or not, as the constructivist argues, a substantive account of morality grounded in practical reason is appropriate or whether, as realists tend to hold, constructivism doesn't give morality an independent enough status. While I don't view realists per se as committed to the view that moral concepts cannot be evaluated in terms of fruitfulness, it will be helpful to pause on Korsgaard's presentation of constructivism here for her useful formulation of the idea that moral concepts solve practical problems.

As I just mentioned, Korsgaard regards the substantive aspect of morality as that of practicality. In particular, she holds that constructivist views regard normative concepts as solutions to practical problems. For Kant, it is the problem of practical reason, a will needing a principle in order to be free.[15] But Korsgaard notes that for Rawls, too, normative concepts can be evaluated in terms of whether they help us to solve practical problems. For Rawls, justice is a normative concept that is supposed to solve problems in liberal societies, societies where people differ in their moral, religious, and other personal commitments but are also committed to peaceful coexistence and mutual toleration (see especially Rawls 1993). Perhaps most obvious in debates

[15] Street (2008) takes Korsgaard to task on this point, arguing that it is implausible to regard this as a practical problem. However, Street in her recent work suggests that metaethics may be therapeutic, helping us to deal with "the problem of attachment and loss" (Street 2016), and so it seems that she is receptive to the thought that moral theory could be evaluated in terms of serving a practical purpose.

surrounding Rawls' earlier work, which was less tied to the notion of a liberal society in particular, is the problem of distributive justice (Rawls 1971). Justice as fairness is a "conception" or specification of the concept of justice intended to solve that problem by offering an account of distributive justice, that, through the original position thought experiment, all should realize is fair to all. My view does not presuppose the truth of constructivism, as I've noted above. The point is that constructivists, and Korsgaard in particular, have given a particularly helpful characterization of the notion that normative concepts are meant to solve practical problems (for Korsgaard, they just *are* solutions to such problems).

There are a number of other issues and positions in moral and political philosophy that bear an important relation to practical action. Take the debate between internalists and externalists in ethics, for instance. For moral internalists, motivation is *internal* to moral judgment – there is a necessary connection between sincere moral judgments and motivations.[16] If someone sincerely judges that they ought to perform an action, according to this view, they must be at least somewhat motivated to perform that action. If they don't have any motivation to perform that action, in other words, the internalist denies that they sincerely judge that they are required to act in that way. This prominent brand of moral internalism is thus committed to a conceptual entailment between moral judgment and action.

[16] For a helpful discussion of this view, which is often referred to as "motivational judgment internalism," see Rosati (2016). For a prominent defense of the view, see Smith (1994). Of course, there are related but distinct internalist views in the literature, but the broad outlines will suffice for my purposes here. Other types of moral internalism, it is also worth noting, hold that the relevant connection is between sincere moral judgment and justifying reasons.

Additionally, discussions of the ought-implies-can principle in moral and political philosophy show that many philosophers are committed to an important role for empirical facts in normative philosophical research. Many philosophers embrace this principle or hold that some nearby principle is correct (Southwood 2016). Most of these principles suggest that the set of our morally obligatory actions consists only in actions that we are capable of performing. Here again, the link between practical action and morality is important, if in a different way. In this case, by looking at the limitations of what human beings are capable of, including psychological limitations, we can learn about the extent of our moral obligations.

What is the relationship between what I have said and the consequentialist notion of a "two-level morality?"[17] At the fundamental level, the consequentialist principle holds that actions – including policies under this term as political or state actions – are right or wrong to the extent that they maximize good consequences. This is the "first principle" of morality. At the level of "secondary principles" (Mill 1864) are empirical generalizations about which types of actions will tend to satisfy the first principle. By appealing to secondary principles, consequentialists have long sought to make their theories accord with commonsense morality. The commonsense principles against doing harm, lying, theft, and so on are principles the adherence to which yields better overall results, in most cases, than directly attempting to apply the consequentialist principle.[18]

[17] The term "two-level morality" is borrowed from R.M. Hare's "two levels of moral thinking" (see Hare 1981). See also J.J.C. Smart's contribution to Smart and Williams (1973). For historical versions of the same underlying thought, see Mill (1864) and Sidgwick (1907). For an influential critique of this approach to defending consequentialism, see Bernard Williams' contribution to Smart and Williams (1973).
[18] Mill (1864); Sidgwick (1907); Hare (1981). I do not here attempt to settle the interpretive issue of whether Mill should be viewed as an act- or rule-consequentialist.

This is one way in which consequentialists have also attempted to answer the self-effacingness objection, by biting the bullet and accepting that most of us, most of the time, should apply other principles than the consequentialist principle if our actions are to maximize good consequences. While secondary principles can be evaluated in terms of how fruitful they are in producing good consequences, the consequentialist principle itself is simply a true moral principle, and its truth is not impugned by the fact that it shouldn't be followed directly.

While I am sympathetic to this line of argument, it doesn't show that most moral and political concepts, as understood by consequentialists, are immune from criticism in terms of their fruitfulness (or lack thereof). To the contrary, consequentialists should accept my view regarding the evaluation of secondary principles – they have done so, as I noted above, in answering the self-effacingness objection, and have used this same strategy to address the demandingness objection. For a consequentialist, all of moral and political theory is not exhausted by establishing the consequentialist principle. They will also typically be interested in what secondary principles are compatible with and follow from this first principle. Defending consequentialism is also taken to require showing that the secondary principles that it supports are morally acceptable – this is part of what makes the appeal to secondary principles important. So examining what secondary principles are fruitful in producing good consequences is a major part of the consequentialist's task, and doing so should involve empirical research into the consequences that follow from applications of these principles.

It's worth noting that for some rule-consequentialists, such as Brad Hooker, a fundamental starting point in building a moral theory is that it should provide moral principles that will be widely shared, and so the self-effacingness objection is avoided. See Hooker (2009).

This is not to say that I am endorsing or relying on any version of consequentialism in putting forward my view of the relationship between the fruitfulness of normative concepts and empirical research. Rather, it is to say that while at the fundamental level consequentialists will not apply criteria of fruitfulness, at the level of secondary principles they will do so. It is open to other theorists, however, to hold that all moral principles, including the consequentialist principle itself, are to be evaluated in terms of their fruitfulness. Because consequentialists typically concede that the consequentialist principle itself should not be applied directly in most circumstances, they will tend not to embrace the view that fruitfulness is a criterion that should be applied to first principles. My point here is that despite this restriction, fruitfulness can play a large role in consequentialist moral and political philosophy, and in fact should play such a role when evaluating the fit between secondary principles and the consequentialist principle.

This is all to make the point that what I have argued here is tied to well-established tendencies in moral and political philosophy and a variety of views and positions in these areas. In terms of the notion of fruitfulness that I have described, there may also be other ways in which moral and political concepts can help us to solve practical problems, such as fruitfulness in helping us to classify various actions, and in allowing us to justify various assignments of duties and responsibilities. Much more can be said on these topics, but the point to note here is that I am interested in particular types of practical fruitfulness, and do not deny that there may be other types of fruitfulness that can go into the evaluation of moral and political concepts.

Further, as I have suggested above, no claim regarding a concept's fruitfulness is likely to be established definitively by the results of only one study. Nor does any one

empirical field have a claim to fundamentality or pre-eminence in providing evidence regarding the fruitfulness of a given normative concept in solving a particular practical problem. Rather, evidence must be taken from both the armchair and the lab and balanced in reflective equilibrium to determine which normative concepts and their conceptions can best solve practical problems. It is in this way that the unspoken agreement that I mentioned at the beginning of section 1, between experimental philosophers and moral and political philosophers who are receptive to empirical research but do not themselves conduct any, can be vindicated.

3. Fruitfulness, Theoretical Criteria, and Practical Problems

I mentioned earlier that fruitfulness is a criterion used to evaluate normative concepts in addition to their being coherent and well motivated from a purely theoretical perspective. In the case of arguments, we are generally only interested in the fruitfulness of ones that we take to be valid and sound. The exception is when an argument contains a premise that makes a claim about the fruitfulness of a concept, in which case the argument would be unsound if we found that claim to be false. But fruitfulness is not meant to shore up concepts or arguments that are bad by purely theoretical standards, ignoring the fact that they are incoherent, invalid, or unsound, as the case may be. The point is to see which concepts and arguments, that at least some reasonable interlocutors take to be good ones, do the best job of helping us to solve practical problems, and of course also to evaluate claims to fruitfulness that might be used in philosophical arguments.

Further, this should not be taken to mean that just any practical problem that a philosophical concept helps us to solve would be relevant to the evaluation of that concept. If the internalization of a philosophical concept unrelated to teenage smoking somehow led to lower teen smoking rates in a population, that would not be a practical problem whose resolution would plausibly bear a relation to the concept's evaluation from the standpoint of philosophy (though perhaps it would from the standpoint of public health). So *relevance* is a condition relating philosophical concepts to practical problems on the basis of subject matter that must be met for the evaluation of a concept in terms of its effects on a practical problem to be philosophically important. My own view is that while some obviously irrelevant practical problems could be impacted by normative concepts, we will generally be able to distinguish these problems from practical problems that are in the ballpark of the concept we are considering. Within this range of problems, we should be fairly liberal in examining the effects that normative concepts can have.

Additionally, the *way* in which a moral or political concept solves a practical problem is important, and not just any way will do. It would be a mistake to take the view that normative concepts can be evaluated in terms of fruitfulness to mean that these concepts are mere coordination mechanisms, to be evaluated solely in terms of whether they bring about stability, motivate people to perform the right kinds of actions, or meet some other practical desiderata. The way that they solve practical problems must be what I will call "value-consistent." This means first that the way that the concept solves the relevant practical problem must be consistent with other plausibly moral values, as opposed to non-moral values, such as control, domination, and so on. Rawls refers to this criterion, in the case of a theory of justice, as that of achieving "stability for the right

reasons" (Rawls 1993). And second, the normative concept must not violate its own commitments in solving a practical problem. To return to the same well-known example, a liberal theory of justice cannot violate the norms of liberalism, which include the commitment that a theory of justice must be neutral among a range of reasonable worldviews or "comprehensive doctrines," in solving the problem of distributive justice in a democratic society. This second criterion doesn't depend on liberalism itself being the right political doctrine, but rather on coherence with liberalism's own commitments. Each of these conditions must be met for the way a normative concept solves a practical problem to be normatively acceptable.

4. Revisiting the Contrary View

As noted earlier, some philosophers will object that moral arguments or concepts should be assessed solely on the basis of conceptual criteria, where fruitfulness is not included among them. It is never a problem, on this view, if an argument or concept does not help us to solve practical problems, and fruitfulness as I understand it is therefore extrinsic to moral and political philosophy. It is first worth pointing out that this objection has to be based on some evidence or reasoning that favors it. It is not enough for the philosopher who opposes the use of fruitfulness as one criterion for helping to determine which normative concepts are the right ones to note that they don't believe that moral and political philosophy should be involved in taking the fruitfulness of these concepts into account.

Second, if this objection is supposed to be grounded in either how philosophy has been done or some consensus on how it should be done, I have shown above that neither of these tacks is a viable option. To the first, many important contributions to philosophy have come from theorists who imposed criteria of fruitfulness on their work in moral and political philosophy. To the second, even if all of these contributions somehow turned out to have been misguided, this would be very surprising to many philosophers, and not just a confirmation of how philosophy should be done. So neither of these ways of sustaining the objection should lead us to think that fruitfulness is simply irrelevant to the evaluation of moral and political concepts.

5. Carnapian Theory Construction and Fruitfulness

Joshua Shepherd and James Justus have also recently defended the positive program in experimental philosophy (Shepherd and Justus 2015), in their case drawing heavily on Rudolf Carnap's views on theory construction (Carnap 1950, 1955). Their defense focuses on Carnap's description of the first of three stages of research that should be conducted in building a philosophical theory, which they call "explication preparation," where the other two stages are explication and fruitfulness. My own view borrows the term it focuses on from Carnap's third stage, although my understanding of fruitfulness differs greatly from Carnap's own. It will be worth pausing to reflect on this difference, and also how Shepherd and Justus' project differs from mine.

Shepherd and Justus argue that experimental philosophy can play an important role in explication preparation, and thereby play a positive role in developing

philosophical theories. For Carnap, good philosophical theorizing involves the "explication" of concepts, which consists of identifying, evaluating, and typically revising the contents of ordinary concepts that we possess and use. Philosophers precisify ordinary concepts in order that they can better serve purposes, primarily the purposes of scientific inquiry for Carnap. Explication preparation involves clarifying the content of an ordinary concept in advance of explication. Once these raw materials have been clarified, explication can proceed in precisifying the concept that is to be used in scientific investigation. Then, that explication or precisification can be evaluated in terms of whether it enhances "fruitfulness." Carnap's core example of the assessment of an explication in terms of fruitfulness is the move from the ordinary concept 'fish' to the scientific concept 'piscis' (Carnap 1950, pp. 5–6). The concept 'fish' is vague and includes many animals that are not cold-blooded or do not have gills throughout their lives. The concept 'piscis' instead denotes only aquatic animals that are cold-blooded and that do have gills throughout life. This precisified concept is more fruitful in virtue of allowing a larger number of true general statements to be formulated, thereby helping us to advance our understanding of underwater life.

Shepherd and Justus focus on explication preparation as the point of contact between experimental philosophy and traditional philosophical methods. Empirical research can reveal ways in which the extensions or intensions of concepts are vague, show that there are multiple concepts operating in our thinking about a certain notion or topic that we took to primarily involve only one concept, discover biases influencing intuitive judgments and their sources, discover other unpredictable, non-bias-related influences on judgments about concepts, and highlight the central features of a concept

and any dependence relationships that concept stands in with others (Shepherd and Justus 2015, pp. 390–1). As they acknowledge, empirical research will not fully determine how any particular explication should proceed. Explication involves choices that are partly guided by the theoretical aims that we have, such as choices about which aspects of a concept must be held onto and which can be abandoned. But nonetheless, there is a positive contribution that empirical research can make to philosophy, according to Shepherd and Justus, in aiding explication preparation.[19]

Shepherd and Justus have provided an important account of one role that experimental research can play in philosophical theory construction. However, two important points are worth noting that should give us pause regarding their account. First, it relies fairly heavily on the Carnapian view of theory construction, and insofar as that view is outmoded or controversial, their account will rest on somewhat shaky footing. Second, and crucially, their view keeps experimental philosophy firmly in a handmaiden position with respect to philosophical research, securing the preconditions for good philosophical theory construction without participating in it. Part of the challenge for experimental philosophy is to explain why it is *philosophy*, not just helpful for preventing or correcting some mistakes that we might make in the early stages of developing our philosophical theories.

Rather than *preparing* us to do philosophy, my view has the implication that experimental philosophy is part of the philosophical enterprise. Instead of Carnap's notion of fruitfulness, which involves yielding a larger number of true general statements, I have presented a number of ways in which philosophical concepts can be fruitful in

[19] For criticism of the claim that experimental philosophy will be particularly helpful in explication preparation, see Pinder (forthcoming).

helping us to solve practical problems. These types of fruitfulness, I have noted, are tied to practical roles that moral and political concepts have been expected by philosophers to be evaluated in relation to. Insofar as one of these philosophical concepts is fruitful, that is a strike in its favor *qua* philosophical concept.

This is not to say that I don't think that experimental philosophy can play the role that Justus and Shepherd describe. Nor am I taking a stand here on the role empirical research might have in explication, or its analogues in other views of theory construction. My view centers on a plausible notion of fruitfulness for moral and political concepts that fits well with the practical roles that many philosophers have already thought that these concepts ought to play. Because these concepts should be evaluated, in part, by criteria of fruitfulness, and empirical research will be important in determining whether or not concepts fulfill these criteria, empirical research is part of the evaluation of these concepts, and hence part of the philosophical enterprise.

6. Haslanger's Ameliorative Inquiry and Resilience

I should also discuss Sally Haslanger's influential view about concepts and the different methods that we might take up in engaging with them (Haslanger 2000, 2012) and how her view relates to what I have said here. Haslanger argues that some concepts might play roles that need to be filled, for instance in a feminist antiracist theory, and that this might be a way of vindicating these concepts. What she calls an "ameliorative inquiry" into questions concerning the nature of gender and race examines the point of having these concepts and what cognitive or practical problems they might be retooled to

help us solve. Our concepts serve cognitive and practical purposes, and these purposes can be advanced or held back depending on how these concepts are characterized. Ameliorative inquiry examines not only the practical roles that concepts in fact play, but also what roles they could play for us in addressing injustices, such as gender inequality and racism. Her approach is meant to go beyond the method of conceptual analysis characteristic of ordinary language philosophy, which might examine concepts like gender and race by attempting to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions of their applications as we currently use them. It is also distinct from a descriptive project that looks at the extension of concepts and, perhaps using empirical means, seeks to determine whether or not these concepts pick out social kinds. Rather, ameliorative inquiry is supposed to allow us to revise our conceptual practices and the extensions of our concepts to better serve the moral or political goals that they can help us to advance.

Some of the points that I have made in this paper can be seen as emphasizing the role that empirical research should play in ameliorative inquiry. As mentioned above, Haslanger's goal of determining which concepts of gender and race "will be effective tools in the fight against injustice" (2000, p. 36) fits well with my characterization of the resilience-based fruitfulness of concepts. Ameliorative inquiry is, in a sense, a project of determining whether important concepts like gender and race can be improved upon in terms of one type[20] of fruitfulness.

[20] It may be the case that the only concepts of gender and race that are fruitful in the resilience sense, of course, will also have to be fruitful in other respects – motivating various kinds of feminist, antiracist actions, preventing sexist and racist actions, and so on. As with other concepts, an exploration of the resilience-based fruitfulness of gender and race may lead to questions concerning the other types of fruitfulness that I have described.

Haslanger is surely right that seemingly non-moral concepts can play political roles and help to structure our interactions. Hence, I don't want my focus on normative concepts to be taken as a point of disagreement with her. Rather, my area of greatest familiarity is with normative concepts. So it is worth distinguishing between how non-normative concepts might be fruitful in a normative way—realizing various moral values or helping to produce political outcomes—without themselves being normative concepts, and the fruitfulness of normative concepts. I take it that Haslanger is more focused on the former, and I am more focused on the latter. Still, it seems to me that much of what I have to say about how normative concepts can be fruitful may also apply to some non-normative concepts. Filling in some of these details is part of the work of my paper that may also be applied as a further defense of Haslanger's notion of ameliorative inquiry, and how empirical research can aid such inquiry. Of course, Knobe's research has shown us that it may be difficult to distinguish between normative and non-normative concepts if our criterion is whether normative considerations go into their application.[21] Subject matter seems more appropriate as a criterion, where normative concepts focus on normative subjects, such as morality and aesthetics, and non-normative concepts focus on subjects that are typically descriptive. On my view, moral and political concepts should be assessed, in part, in terms of their fruitfulness in helping us to solve practical problems. This view is fully compatible with the view that other concepts may also play important practical roles in political life, and therefore also be assessed in terms of their fruitfulness.

[21] For a helpful overview, see Knobe (2010).

7. The Role of Philosophers in Empirical Research

But why should philosophers be the ones conducting experiments? Why isn't everything that I've said best taken as suggesting that philosophers should engage with the work of, and perhaps collaborate with, psychologists? Depending on what is meant by "collaboration," I will disagree or agree with the statement implied by the second question. If collaboration means discussing the experiments and their design, talking through the relevant philosophical issues, and working to interpret the data and its philosophical significance, there is nothing wrong with the statement. This kind of "active" collaboration, to give it a name, is fine and to be encouraged even. The problem is "passive" or inactive collaboration, where the philosopher simply draws on existing empirical research, typically only the research that seems to fit with what they want to say, and leaves the rest of the empirical issues to the psychologists. Indirectly, this problem of "cherry picking" will be more likely to be avoided if philosophers are actively collaborating with psychologists and working on empirical research. But the further answer to the first question of why philosophers shouldn't just let others conduct the experiments, in the sense of being involved in their design, administration, and interpretation, is that the right kinds of empirical work won't get done on this approach. Philosophers are trained to draw distinctions that psychologists are generally not sensitive to. Our disciplinary foci are different, and the ornateness of philosophical questions makes it the case that philosophical training is generally required to address them. Training is required to appreciate the importance of the nitty gritty questions that are within a philosophical debate, and how to design experiments to test questions at a level

of specificity that is germane to those parts of a debate. In general, philosophical work isn't on the biggest questions, but rather takes place within a set of assumptions and conversations that presuppose particular ways of approaching those questions. With the questions raised in moral and political philosophy, it is important that people who have the training to see just what concepts are being evaluated and how their fruitfulness is relevant to the philosophical questions under consideration be involved in designing, conducting, and interpreting the results of empirical research. On my view, evaluating the fruitfulness of normative concepts is part of the enterprise of doing moral and political philosophy. But conducting empirical research that will help us to determine the fruitfulness of these concepts and the relevance of this research to existing philosophical debates involves attention to distinctions and subtleties that generally requires philosophical training. An important upshot of my view is that moral and political philosophers must be actively involved in conducting empirical research that will help us to ascertain whether particular normative concepts are fruitful ones.

8. The Relation between the Positive Program and the Negative Program

In providing this defense of the positive program, I want to make clear that none of what I have said should be taken to suggest that positive program experimental philosophers must always disagree with arguments coming from experimental philosophers working in the negative program. Indeed, a given researcher may work in both programs, because they still seek to determine the extent to which empirical research can support and be harmonized with traditional philosophical methods, or whether such

research tends to undermine these methods. One should not think about these programs as sites of membership, in my view, but rather as approaches that carry some methodological commitments. Neither program should be thought to require those advancing it to assume that traditional a priori philosophical methods are or are not probative or useful. A program in research, like a normative concept, can be partially assessed by the fruit that it bears.

There is room, then, for those who tend to work in the positive program to sometimes regard an empirical result as undermining a given philosophical argument or position. For instance, if all the intuitions that support a given position seem to arise from suspect cognitive mechanisms, and the argument that those mechanisms are suspect is very convincing, an experimental philosopher working in the positive program might reject that position or assign it a very low credence. Even when one disagrees with such debunking attempts, it may be useful to view these attempts and the debates that they generate as teaching us about what would be required for empirical research to make us doubt a given philosophical position.[22] My point in this paper is that there is also good reason to think that empirical research can lead us to support or increase our credence in a philosophical position.

[22] The debate surrounding Joshua Greene's attempts to show that the results of neuroimaging studies militate against deontology and in favor of consequentialism may be a helpful example of one such debate. See Greene et al. (2001); Singer (2005); Greene (2007, 2013, 2014); Sinnott-Armstrong (2006); Berker (2009); Kahane (2012); Kumar and Campbell (2012).

9. Conclusion

Moral and political concepts can be evaluated, in part, in terms of their fruitfulness. What kinds of actions they motivate people to perform and prevent them from performing, whether they help us in fighting back against injustices and other problematic social phenomena, whether they can be subjects of consensus among people of good will, and whether they provide us with useful guidance are factors that determine whether these concepts can help us to solve practical problems. The view that I have presented here shows that experimental philosophy can be part of normative philosophical research, because assessing the fruitfulness of moral and political concepts will require empirical research. Rather than merely clearing the way for traditional methods to be employed, empirical research is continuous with traditional philosophical methodology. This view is also compatible with a plausible explanation of why philosophers, in particular, should be involved in empirical research. Of course, no interesting view appeals to everyone. Some philosophers are opposed to letting empirical research into the set of approaches that shed light on philosophical questions. Yet many other philosophers, as I have shown, should be receptive to the view that I have offered. Indeed, as long as one regards "what practical purposes should our moral and political concepts serve?" as a sensible question to ask, they are the sort of theorist who can endorse what I have said about the value of empirical research in addressing issues in moral and political philosophy.

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