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Outline of a Contextualist Moral Epistemology

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At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §253

Why is integrity important and lying bad? I don't know. It just is. I don't want to be bothered by challenging that.

—Interviewee, *Habits of the Heart*¹

An inquiry, to have that completely satisfactory result called demonstration, has only to start with propositions perfectly free from all actual doubt. If the premises are not in fact doubted at all, they cannot be more satisfactory than they are.

—C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.358

Epistemological contextualism, which has its roots in the writings of pragmatists like Peirce and Dewey and in the later Wittgenstein, is often characterized as an alternative to the more traditional approaches in analytic epistemology. In opposition to both foundationalist and coherentist views about the structure of justification and knowledge, the contextualist claims (in the spirit of the above Wittgenstein quote) that justified belief is ultimately based on beliefs that are not themselves justified. But other so-called contextualist claims, not having to do with structural issues, have gained increasing recognition and discussion by analytic epistemologists in recent years. One such claim (vaguely expressed) is that possession of such epistemic goods as knowledge and justification depends importantly on one's circumstances or "context," including in particular certain facts about one's social group. Unfortunately, "contextualism" and talk of justification and knowledge being sensitive to context are used to cover a variety of themes and theses, some of them fairly uncontroversial, others quite controversial.

My aim here is to articulate and partially defend a moral epistemology that incorporates a number of contextualist themes. More specifically, my

plan is this: Because contextualism is perhaps less familiar to moral epistemologists than other epistemological views, but also because of the variety of contextualist themes and theses that have been recently defended, the first section of this chapter will be devoted to sorting out and clarifying the most important of these contextualist ideas. As we shall see, I am interested in defending a version of what I call “structural contextualism” regarding justified moral belief. However, because there is no one notion of justification but many (arguably legitimate) notions, section two of the chapter is devoted to making clear the epistemic notion—a notion of *epistemic responsibility*—that is the focus of my thinking about the justification of moral belief. In the third section, I clarify the main theses of structural contextualism, and then in section four I proceed to elaborate a version of structural contextualism about moral belief. A full defense of contextualism would require that I develop this view in the context of a story about the semantics and associated metaphysics of moral discourse. That project is for another occasion.² Here I have the more limited aim of convincing the reader that the version of contextualism I advocate is a promising approach to questions about the justification of moral belief.

Epistemological Contextualism

I’m going to distinguish between what I will call *circumstantial contextualism*, *normative contextualism*, and *structural contextualism*. The first two theses are roughly analogous to familiar relativist views in ethics. The third represents a response to the infamous regress of justification problem and so rivals foundationalist and coherentist responses to that problem.

Circumstantial Contextualism

One contextualist theme in recent epistemology (applied to the issue of justification), which I will call “circumstantial contextualism,” can be expressed this way:

CC: Whether one has knowledge of, or indeed justifiedly believes, some proposition is partly dependent on certain facts about oneself and certain facts about one’s environment.

Now it is uncontroversial that whether or not one knows or justifiedly believes some proposition depends on “internal” (psychological) features of one’s circumstances such as evidence one has (whether in the form of other beliefs or certain experiential states), and whether or not one possesses any undermining evidence, and so forth. But many epistemologists have called attention to certain “external” features of one’s circumstances that may affect the epistemic status of one’s beliefs. Goldman’s case of the papier-mâché barns is a well-known example.³ In that example, one has excellent perceptual evidence that there is a barn in the field though one is unaware of the fact that the sur-

rounding countryside is populated with papier-mâché barn facsimiles. In this case one apparently fails to know that there is a barn in the field because of facts about one's immediate environment representing relevant evidence one does not possess. This is a case in which knowledge is sensitive to one's *physical* environment.

The idea that knowledge and justification depend on facts about one's *social* environment—that epistemic appraisal has a “social dimension”—has been of particular interest in recent epistemology. According to Stewart Cohen and Ernest Sosa, there is an interesting connection between certain social facts—facts about one's community—and requirements relating to the use of an individual's cognitive faculties that nicely illustrates how knowledge and justification can depend on one's social circumstances.

Cohen's contextualism emerges from his study of the conditions under which evidence one *does* possess undermines one's knowledge. He argues first of all that whether or not defeaters one possesses (i.e., beliefs one has that count as evidence against some proposition one believes) undermine one's knowledge of that proposition depends on the reasoning abilities of a normal member of a relevant social group and whether, in particular, the fact that some evidence one possesses is a defeater would be obvious to normal members of that group. Thus, on Cohen's view, one component of knowledge is determined by certain psychological facts about society. But which social group or society serves as the basis for judging the obviousness of defeaters? Cohen's own proposal is that “the standards in effect in a particular context are determined by the normal reasoning powers of the attributor's social group.”⁴ In light of this social dimension of knowledge, Cohen proposes that ascriptions (and denials) of knowledge are best construed as indexical or context-sensitive: the set of intersubjective standards of obviousness that apply in ascriptions of knowledge can vary from context to context depending on which group counts as the attributor group. The idea that knowledge involves a socially determined level of reasoning ability perhaps also applies to the cognitive faculties of memory and perception.⁵ Not only might epistemic requirements for dealing with counterevidence be gauged by certain social facts having to do with cognitive abilities, but other social factors may play a role in knowledge. Sosa, for example, argues that the extent to which members of one's social group possess some bit of information affects one's knowledge. If, for example, most everyone in one's community has information that defeats some true proposition that one otherwise has excellent evidence for believing, then arguably one fails to know. According to Sosa reflection on such cases make it “plausible to conclude that knowledge has a further ‘social aspect,’ that it cannot depend on one's missing or blinking what is generally known.”⁶

Normative Contextualism

Another contextualist claim is that justification (rationality, knowledge) depends on, or is relative to, the social practices and norms of communities of inquirers. Some contextualists like to point out how our knowledge-gathering

practices are social in nature and importantly tethered to the epistemic practices and norms of the members of our group (however talk of “our group” is to be understood). Construed as a descriptive claim about our epistemic evaluations this claim is perhaps (with some qualifications) correct since it amounts to the claim that *as a matter of fact* our epistemic evaluations are typically made on the basis of (“relative to”) the practices and norms generally accepted and used by a community of inquirers to which we belong. However, the contextualists I have in mind intend the claim normatively (i.e., as a claim about the conditions under which one knows, or is justified in holding, some belief). If we let “context” refer to some community of inquirers and the relevant evaluative practices and norms they share, then we can formulate a working characterization of normative contextualism this way:

NC: A person *S* is justified at time *t* in believing some proposition *p* in context *C* just in case *S*'s holding *p* at *t* conforms to the relevant set of epistemic practices and norms operative in *C*.

I am calling particular attention to the idea that there is a social dimension to epistemic evaluation because the idea that knowledge and justification depend on one's social group can be taken in two ways. First, as we have seen with Cohen and Sosa, it can be taken as one feature (or set of features) of one's circumstances that is relevant for epistemic appraisal. But, as just explained, it can also be taken as the idea that knowledge and justification *are relative to the epistemic standards of one's social group or community*, so that whether or not one has knowledge or is justified in believing some proposition depends on whether or not one's belief conforms to the epistemic norms of one's group. The thesis of circumstantial contextualism, then, should not be confused with normative contextualism. In ethics, it is standard to distinguish between circumstantial (situational, environmental) relativism and ethical relativism. The former is analogous to what I am calling circumstantial contextualism and is often expressed as the general thesis that the rightness and wrongness of particular actions, practices and so forth depend in part on facts about the agent's circumstances. So, for instance, whether it would be wrong for an onlooker to refrain from jumping into the deep end in an effort to save a drowning child depends (in part) on facts about that person and, in particular, on whether or not she can swim. Ethical relativism, by contrast, represents a normative theory which, in perhaps its most common variety, relativizes moral truth to the moral standards of groups: the moral standards of a group (together with relevant factual information) determine which particular moral statements are true for members of that group. Now the epistemological analog of ethical relativism is what I am calling normative contextualism. My point here is that just as we should not confuse circumstantial relativism in ethics with normative ethical relativism, so we should not interpret the circumstantial contextualism of Cohen and Sosa as equivalent to, or entailing, normative contextualism.⁷

I should mention at this point that it is not my intention to defend some version of normative contextualism over and against nonrelativist epistemological views. As we shall see in the section on justification and epistemic responsibility, it may be legitimate in some contexts and for some purposes to evaluate the epistemic status of an individual's beliefs relative to the epistemic norms of that person's community. But there are contexts in which we intend to make nonrelativized, categorical epistemic evaluations, even if, in doing so, we obviously employ epistemic norms that we accept.

Structural Contextualism

In the last two decades, work in analytic epistemology has been dominated by structural issues relating to justification and knowledge. What is called contextualism is often taken to be a thesis about the *structure of justification* intended as one response to the infamous *regress of justification* problem. That problem gets generated when we notice that some of the propositions that we (presumably) justifiably believe owe their justification to other beliefs that we accept—such beliefs forming an epistemic chain. But unless these further, justifying beliefs in the chain are themselves justified we only seem to have what we might call *conditional justification*: the original link in the chain is justified *if* the further links are justified. But then how are we to understand the nature of unconditional justification? The two standard options in response to this question are these: 1) *epistemic foundationalism*: the regress stops with beliefs that are somehow noninferentially justified in the sense of not owing their justification to being inferred from, or otherwise grounded on, other beliefs; 2) *epistemic coherentism*: there are no regress stoppers, rather justification is a matter of the interconnectedness of a finite set of beliefs. Contextualism represents a third option: 3) *epistemic contextualism*: the regress ends with beliefs that are not in need of justification in a given context.⁸ So what I'm calling structural contextualism may be informally characterized as follows:

SC: Regresses of justification may legitimately terminate with beliefs, which, in the context in question, *are not in need of justification*. Call these latter beliefs, *contextually basic beliefs*.⁹

This admittedly rough formulation at best only conveys the basic structural picture of justification the contextualist favors. For one thing talk about "context" is left unexplained, as is talk about beliefs not needing justification. I save the task of clarifying these crucial notions until I have clarified (in the next section) the specific notion of epistemic appraisal operative in my thinking. However, before going on, note that SC, as formulated, does not *require* that all inferentially justified beliefs be based on contextually basic beliefs, rather it allows that regresses *may* legitimately terminated with such beliefs. This means that the contextualist can allow (strictly speaking) that an individual's justified beliefs may exhibit either a foundationalist or a coherentist structure.¹⁰

What the contextualist claims is that the contextualist picture represents a realistic and largely accurate picture of the actual structure of an ordinary individual's justified beliefs. And this indeed is what I plan to argue in connection with moral belief.

To conclude, we should recognize three general contextualist theses. I take circumstantial contextualism to be fairly uncontroversial, though epistemologists may disagree over the sorts of circumstantial factors that affect the epistemic status of an individual's beliefs. As we shall see, the moral epistemology that I go on to defend features the importance of one's social circumstances in coming to have justified moral beliefs. Normative contextualism (i.e., epistemological relativism) is quite controversial and should not be confused with circumstantial or structural contextualism. The contextualist moral epistemology I plan to defend is not intended as a version of normative contextualism. Finally, I do plan to defend a version of structural contextualism about justified moral belief, which will occupy most of my attention in what follows.

Justification and Epistemic Responsibility

To set the stage for the version of epistemological contextualism I propose to defend, I first need to specify the notion of epistemic appraisal at work in my thinking. My primary interest here is with questions about the justification of moral belief and not with questions of proving, showing, or demonstrating moral principles. I need to clarify what I mean here, and I also need to say something about how certain terms of epistemic evaluation (such as "justification," "rationality") work. As I will explain, ascriptions of justification (and rationality) are best interpreted as involving certain contextually variable parameters.¹¹ Getting clear about these matters will allow me to clarify the specific notion of doxastic justification that interests me, the notion of being *epistemically responsible* in what one believes. Let me elaborate.

Preliminary Remarks about Justification

In this paper I am interested in questions about *doxastic justification*, that is, with questions of when someone justifiably holds some token belief, specifically a moral belief.¹² Questions about doxastic justification should be distinguished from questions about the conditions under which some proposition or claim can be proved true, validated, or "justified," apart from anyone believing it—call this *nondoxastic justification*. In ethics, much of the focus has been on nondoxastic justification. I'm here thinking of attempts by moral philosophers to explain what sorts of considerations can be used to prove or show the truth (validity) of moral propositions or claims including especially moral principles. Examples include: Marcus Singer's¹³ attempt to prove the Generalization Argument Principle based on an appeal to the logic of moral discourse, Gewirth's¹⁴ attempt to prove the so-called Principle of Generic Consistency based on claims about the nature of rational action, Donagan's¹⁵ attempt to

prove a Kantian Respect for Persons Principle based on claims about the nature of practical reasons and the nature of moral agents, Brandt's¹⁶ attempt to justify a version of rule utilitarianism based largely on empirical considerations from cognitive psychology, Rawls's¹⁷ attempt to justify his two principles of justice based on considerations of overall coherence broadly conceived, and Hare's¹⁸ attempt to justify a utilitarian moral principle based on the logic of ethical concepts. Because moral principles are at the heart of normative moral theories, the attempts of these moral philosophers to prove or demonstrate moral principles are concerned with questions of *theory acceptance* in ethics, and not directly concerned with questions of what I am calling doxastic justification.¹⁹ However, even if one takes an antitheory stance in ethics and denies that moral phenomena can be systematized by a single principle or even a small set of principles, the distinction between doxastic and nondoxastic justification can and should be made.²⁰

In contemporary epistemology we find a variety of accounts of doxastic justification. In his recent book, Richard Foley points out that ascriptions of rationality should be understood to involve (at least tacitly) reference to (1) a goal or set of goals and (2) a perspective.²¹ I am primarily interested in a notion of doxastic justification that can be usefully understood along the lines Foley recommends for rational belief. Whether or not the notion I am interested in is identical to Foley's notion of rational belief, I leave open. What I propose, then, following Foley, is to think of ascriptions of doxastic justification as involving certain contextually variable parameters. Let me briefly comment on two of these parameters, and then I will be able to characterize more precisely the notion doxastic justification featured in my thinking.

First of all, then, evaluations employing talk of justification normally invoke, either explicitly or tacitly, some goal or goals to be promoted in having justified beliefs. Here it is standard to distinguish epistemic goals such as having true beliefs and avoiding false ones, from various nonepistemic goals such as survival. Correspondingly, we distinguish between epistemic justification and nonepistemic justification. Whether some belief is epistemically justified (from some perspective) depends on whether, from within the appropriate perspective, the belief in question apparently²² promotes the goals of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones. Whether a belief is nonepistemically justified depends on whether the belief apparently promotes or satisfies some nonepistemic goal. In ethics, especially, where debates over whether moral sentences are true or even have truth values are center stage, it is particularly important to distinguish epistemic from nonepistemic justification.

Second, ascriptions of justification presuppose some perspective. Foley characterizes a perspective as a set of beliefs or body of opinion possessed by some actual or imaginary individual or group. Presumably, this body of opinion includes epistemic beliefs that reflect a set of epistemic standards that figure in the perspective in question.²³ There are various epistemic perspectives from which epistemic evaluations proceed; some of the more familiar include: the subjective or egocentric perspective of an individual agent, the intersubjec-

tive or sociocentric perspective of some community, the perspective of some group of experts, and the perspective of an ideally knowledgeable observer. The fact that justification talk is perspectival often goes unnoticed since we often do not make explicit the perspective from which such evaluations are made. But the various perspectives operative in our ascriptions of justification and rationality simply reflect various evaluative interests and purposes we have. For instance, when we are interested in understanding some belief held by a particular person (perhaps oneself) on some past occasion, and when in retrospect that belief now seems pretty clearly mistaken, we often are interested in how things looked to the agent on the occasion in question (at least if we are disposed to view the person charitably). Here it is natural to invoke an egocentric perspective and ask whether, given the agent's epistemic perspective at the time, she was justified in holding the belief in question.

However, for certain purposes we might be interested in evaluating an individual relative to the epistemic standards prevalent in her community, in which case our evaluation involves a sociocentric perspective. Still, in other contexts, we have an interest in questions about justification apart from some subjective or intersubjective perspective and the perspective of an ideally knowledgeable spectator—a way of capturing an objective perspective—is appropriate. The most important lesson to learn from all this talk about perspectives is nicely expressed by Foley: “There is no single perspective that is adequate for understanding the entire range of our judgments of rationality. We make such judgments for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts, and the kind of judgment we are inclined to make varies with these purposes and contexts.”²⁴

Obviously, there is much more to be said about these contextually variable parameters of doxastic justification, and some understanding of how they operate will emerge as we proceed. But having said this much, I can now indicate more clearly the focus of my thinking about moral justification.

First, I am interested in the *epistemic appraisal* of individuals's *beliefs*—doxastic epistemic appraisal—where the primary goal involved in such appraisal is the having of true beliefs and the avoiding of false ones. Second, I am particularly interested in the sort of epistemic appraisal that is operative in our everyday, common epistemic appraisals of individuals.²⁵ The sort of appraisal I have in mind concerns questions about how one might be *epistemically responsible* in the beliefs one holds. Now one illuminating way of evaluating the epistemic responsibility of an agent is to invoke the perspective of what we might call an “epistemically responsible agent” on analogy with the idea of the “reasonable person” standard from Anglo-American law.²⁶ The idea is to use this model as a basis for investigating the basic epistemic norms (and general epistemic sensibility) that we normally do and should use in evaluating the epistemic status of moral belief. There are two crucial features that this model must have if it is going to serve in this role. First, if it is to have any sort of normative bite and thus be useful as a measure of a person being epistemically responsible in the beliefs she holds, then it must take on the character of an idealization. The epistemically responsible agent is one whose

epistemic activities serve as a norm for our epistemic activities: we *ought* to conform to those norms characteristic of the responsible agent. Second, given our interest in characterizing a notion of epistemic justification that is applicable to human beings, we want a notion of epistemic responsibility that is not overly idealized. In short, we want a model of epistemic responsibility that represents a “realistic ideal.” With these constraints in mind, let me now proceed to sketch (part of) a model of epistemic responsibility.

Epistemic Responsibility

Broadly speaking, being epistemically responsible has to do with such activities as: (1) gathering evidence, (2) considering and dealing with counterpossibilities, and (3) dealing with internal conflicts of belief. We normally criticize agents whose beliefs are not based on adequate evidence, who have not checked out relevant counterpossibilities to what they believe, and who fail to eliminate certain conflicts of belief. To be epistemically responsible in what one believes, one must not fall below certain standards or norms governing these activities. What do the norms require? More specifically: How much evidence is enough for having a justified belief? Which counterpossibilities must one check? Which conflicts of belief must one eliminate? Since we are interested in the perspective of the responsible epistemic agent, these questions are about the most general epistemic norms characteristic of this representative agent. Limitations of space do not permit a full treatment of these matters here, but we can provide a partial sketch of an epistemically responsible agent that will be sufficient for present purposes by focusing primarily on those epistemic responsibilities and associated norms that have to do with checking counterpossibilities.²⁷

Responsibility for checking counterpossibilities to propositions we currently believe (or propositions we are considering) can range from very strict requirements corresponding to a norm requiring persons to check all logically possible counterpossibilities (including the sorts of fanciful skeptical scenarios devised by philosophers) to very lax requirements where, in the limit, there would be a complete freedom from doing any checking at all. In between the extremes is a range of possible norms requiring more or less of an agent. If we begin with the assumption that some sort of “in-between” requirement not only fits actual epistemic practice, but is defensible, then one plausible suggestion for specifying the range of counterpossibilities for which one is epistemically responsible is this:²⁸

ER: A person *S* is epistemically responsible in believing some proposition *p* at time *t* only if *S* checks all of those counterpossibilities whose seriousness is indicated by *S*'s background beliefs at *t*.²⁹

This is a start, but it will not do as it stands. For one thing, insofar as the epistemically responsible agent is a projection of normal human beings with normal cognitive powers, ER is too strong—it fails to take into consideration

normal human powers of for example, inference and memory. Moreover, it ignores those counterpossibilities whose seriousness is implied by information we *ought* to be aware of even if we lack the information in question. Let us proceed to refine ER in light of these remarks.

First of all, in some respects, our model epistemic agent represents an idealization of actual human epistemic practice. So, for instance, our model does idealize away from certain factors that would interfere with or distort the judgment of our epistemically responsible agent. First, the epistemically responsible agent is presumed to always conform his or her beliefs to the relevant set of epistemic norms, just as in the law, the reasonable person “is not to be identified with any ordinary person who might occasionally do unreasonable things; he is a prudent and careful person, who is always up to standard.”³⁰ Second, in characterizing the activities of our model agent, we ignore drunkenness, being drugged, being tired, being distracted, and other such inhibiting factors that would impair the normal judgment of a normal person. Third, our model agent is free from the sorts of pressing emergency situations that would interfere with his or her focusing and reflecting adequately on some proposition or belief whose epistemic status is in question.

However, in other respects, we want our imaginary agent to reflect normal human abilities. Just as in the law, where the representative reasonable person is expected to have cognitive capacities that are “normal” for human beings, our model of a representative epistemic agent should be similarly constituted. We can begin by noting that there are all sorts of deductive inferences that are completely infeasible for normal human beings to perform. And similarly for nondeductive inferences. If some such inferences are impossible for normal humans to make or are, in some looser sense, infeasible, then we should not hold people responsible for counterpossibilities that would require that they make infeasible inferences from their current belief set. We do expect people to make inferences from their current belief set that are humanly feasible—feasible for normal human beings. And here is where empirical considerations yielding theories of deductive and nondeductive *feasibility* as Cherniak³¹ calls them, or theories of *obviousness* as Cohen³² calls them, come into play in helping to set acceptable standards of epistemic care for checking counterpossibilities. Moreover, in setting the level of epistemic responsibility for dealing with counterevidence we expect individuals to be able to recall relevant information from memory, though again, we do not hold people to standards of memory recall that exceed what is feasible for normal human beings. Theories of feasible inference and feasible memory, then, also help to set levels of epistemic responsibility appropriate for normal human beings. For convenience, let us use the expression “obvious counterpossibilities” to refer to those counterpossibilities a normal human being with normal cognitive powers could be expected to recognize. Thus, our original proposal should be revised so that we are required to check some but not all of those counterpossibilities implied by what we believe, where limits on which counterpossibility checking is partly determined by our empirical views about “normal” cognitive capacities.

However, there is more to our understanding of epistemic responsibility for dealing with counterpossibilities. That is, merely checking all of those obvious counterpossibilities whose seriousness is implied by one's current belief set does not mean that one is being epistemically responsible, since (1) one might simply lack certain general information that anyone can be expected to know or (2) be negligent in acquiring evidence that bears on some specific issue or claim. (Here is one place where responsibilities concerning the gathering of evidence characteristic of the epistemically responsible agent come into play.) With regard to general information one ought to have, there are certain things anyone is expected to know, where we are relying in particular on such social phenomena as common experience (e.g., fire burns, water will drown, and countless other bits of information), widely shared educational experiences (e.g., elementary facts about history, physical science, and so forth), and information gathered more informally such as through the media. Again, this general knowledge requirement is reflected in the doctrine of the reasonable person: "there is a minimum standard of knowledge, based upon what is common to the community,"³³ which the reasonable person possesses and thus ordinary agents ought to possess.

With regard to quite special information bearing specifically on some claim or belief, again, what is common to a community normally helps determine the extent of one's responsibility for being aware of that information. A slightly modified example from Austin³⁴ makes the point clear. If I look out my window and see what I take to be a goldfinch in my front yard, ordinarily I would be justified in believing that there is a goldfinch there. But suppose that stuffed toy goldfinches have become all the rage with children in my neighborhood and everyone is talking about it, though I have been oblivious to this fact. Nothing that I currently believe implies that there is a decent chance that the goldfinch I'm looking at is a toy; however I am subject to fair epistemic criticism because I should have known about the fad. Of course, sometimes information that I ought to acquire is something that is indicated by the beliefs I currently hold, but in this case, the information one ought to have is information possessed by folks in one's immediate community. Thus, as Sosa³⁵ and others have argued, we are normally held responsible for information representing counterpossibilities that is generally known in our community—ignorance of such information is typically no excuse. This fact about our epistemic practices reflects the importance of the idea that there is a social dimension to epistemic responsibility. In fact, this social dimension plays an important part in the contextualist's picture of epistemic responsibility as we shall see in the next section.

If we let the expression "adequate set of background beliefs" refer to the background beliefs the agent does possess plus any that he ought to possess, we can reformulate ER to reflect the point about socially available information as well as the point about obviousness of counterpossibilities:

ER': A person *S* is epistemically responsible in believing some proposition *p* at time *t* only if *S* checks all of those obvious counter-

possibilities whose seriousness is indicated by an adequate set of background beliefs at *t*.

There is much more to be said about this principle and about the notion of epistemic responsibility generally, but I hope what I have said is clear enough for our immediate purposes.

Up to this point in this section, I have been engaging in what I take to be a largely descriptive enterprise of accurately characterizing an important feature of our actual, everyday epistemic evaluations. But I also think that there is good reason to endorse this norm and other, related norms. I have in mind a pragmatic rationale that views epistemic norms in terms of their point and purpose for limited creatures like us. In brief the rationale is this: Given that we are finite creatures with limited cognitive resources and that we have all sorts of nonepistemic goals in life, we would expect any genuinely useful epistemic norms to reflect such facts. We have now explicitly fashioned ER* so that it reflects our limited cognitive abilities. Moreover, the fact that our epistemic norms do not normally require of us that we devote inordinate amounts of time to checking our claims and beliefs for possible error, rather they require only that we expend a “reasonable” amount of time doing so, reflects the fact that we are not purely intellectual beings whose only concern is with having an interesting stock of true beliefs.³⁶ Life is short and there are other things to do. Given the need for some epistemic norms, but given what we are like (including limitations), norms like ER* seem to be the very sort of norms we would want and expect to be operative in everyday life. So, once we think about norms in these broadly pragmatic terms, we can see that the sorts of norms we do tend to use are ones for which there is a good rationale.

Finally, before leaving this section, I want to raise a question that is directly related to what follows. First, a bit of terminology. As I am using the term, *epistemic responsibility* is a broader notion than the notion of justified belief. For an individual to be positively epistemically justified in believing some proposition is for one to have positive (undefeated) sufficient reasons or grounds for that proposition. Being epistemically responsible in holding a belief does not necessarily require that one be justified in holding the belief. So, in light of our characterization of epistemic responsibility, we might ask whether one is always required to have justifying reasons for all of the beliefs one holds, and holds without being epistemically irresponsible. Perhaps in some contexts at least, certain beliefs that one is not irresponsible in holding, and which play an epistemic role in the justification of other beliefs, do not themselves *need* justification. Whether or not there are cases like this will depend on the epistemic norms and practices characteristic of our epistemically responsible agent. It might be the case, after all, that in some contexts, we are epistemically responsible in holding certain beliefs that can serve as a basis for holding other beliefs, even if we do not have justifying reasons for the justifying beliefs in question.

In fact I do think this is the case and that the sort of pragmatic rationale just sketched in defense of ER* can be extended to explain why our epistemic

practices are this way. In brief—given such facts as that we have nonepistemic goals, that we are not able to remember everything we have learned, and that any intellectual endeavor takes time, we simply should not spend time investigating and gathering evidence for all of our beliefs; in fact we could not possibly do so. We have no choice but to rely on all sorts of beliefs, skills, and abilities we do have when we engage in any intellectual pursuit. Reflection on our finitary predicament, then, makes it plausible to suppose that one is epistemically responsible in holding a belief unless there are concrete reasons for suspicion. (Recall Peirce's methodological remark quoted in the third epigraph.)³⁷ And this allows that one may be responsible in believing some proposition even if one no longer has, or indeed, has never had, positive evidence of a sort that would serve as justifying reasons for the proposition in question. The idea that one may be epistemically responsible in holding certain beliefs without needing justification is central to what I have been calling structural contextualism. Let us consider that thesis in more detail.

More on Structural Contextualism

Having partially sketched a notion of epistemic responsibility that is the basis for the sort of epistemic evaluation I am interested in describing, I want to return to structural contextualism for purposes of clarifying that thesis. Recall that according to structural contextualism, certain beliefs, at least in certain contexts, do not need justification although they may provide one with justifying reasons for holding other beliefs. Let us take a closer look at the claim that certain beliefs, at least in certain contexts, may not need justification.

As I am understanding the basic structural contextualist thesis, it is comprised of three basic tenets: (1) One may be epistemically responsible in holding certain beliefs at some time t even though one has no justifying evidence or justifying reasons for holding those beliefs at t . (2) Such beliefs may serve as an epistemic basis for being justified in holding other beliefs. (3) Which beliefs need justification depends crucially on certain facts about one's social circumstances—one's social context. Let us take these one by one.

1. The thesis that it is possible for someone to be epistemically responsible in holding a belief without justification is one way to express what has come to be called *epistemic conservatism*. The epistemic conservative claims that mere doxastic commitment may be enough to create some degree of epistemic respectability for certain beliefs. There are two basic versions of this conservative doctrine.³⁸ According to *first-order conservatism*, epistemic respectability may accrue to a belief as a result of simply holding that belief or, more plausibly, as a result of holding that belief so long as it does not conflict with other beliefs one has. According to *second-order conservatism*, second-order beliefs—beliefs about beliefs—are necessary for creating some degree of epistemic respectability for a first-order belief. So, for example, according to one possible version of second-order conservatism, in order for some level of epistemic respectability to accrue to some belief (for which one has no justi-

fying reasons or evidence), one must not only have the belief, but one must also believe of it that there is something that in some sense makes obvious (e.g., something that justifies or shows true) the belief in question.³⁹ In short, one must take the belief to be epistemically sound.⁴⁰

This is not the place to launch into an investigation of epistemic conservatism. Jonathan Kvanvig⁴¹ has convincingly argued that versions of first-order conservatism are not defensible but that any fallibilist epistemology needs to recognize a version of second-order conservatism. In the previous section, I offered a tentative and admittedly sketchy defense of conservatism that appeals to our finitary predicament: given limits on our cognitive abilities and limits on our time, it makes sense that our epistemic practices do not always require of believers that they have evidence or justifying reasons for everything they responsibly believe. As we shall see in the next section, our epistemic practices regarding moral belief exhibit this same sort of conservatism. So I shall proceed on the assumption that second-order conservatism is correct.

2. The second basic tenet of the structural contextualist—what we might call the thesis of *epistemic adequacy*—claims that beliefs that one is epistemically responsible in holding, but for which one has no justification, are sometimes enough, epistemically speaking, to serve as a basis, or partial basis, for justifiably believing other propositions. Regresses of justification can legitimately terminate with beliefs that one does not have justifying reasons for holding. If I am right, and our actual epistemic practices conform to the thesis of epistemic adequacy, this fact about the thesis provides, I would argue, some presumptive reason in its favor. But again, this thesis, like the thesis of epistemic conservatism, requires more in the way of defense than I can provide here.

3. Finally, whether or not a belief needs to be justified in order to serve as a properly basic belief depends crucially on context and, in particular, on social context. Call this the *social context sensitivity* thesis. Now, the general idea that correct epistemic appraisals are context-sensitive, in the sense of being dependent on one's circumstances, is not exciting and, as we saw in the discussion on justification and epistemic responsibility, not controversial. In general, whether or not an individual is justified (or if not justified then at least epistemically responsible) in holding some belief will depend on certain features of his or her circumstances. What makes contextualism distinctive is the claim that correct epistemic appraisal and, in particular, whether or not one's belief needs justification, depends crucially on one's "social context"—upon certain social facts. We have already noted that certain social facts (e.g., facts about the normal intelligence level of one's social group) importantly affect correct epistemic appraisal, and, again, the fact that the epistemic status of one's beliefs is sensitive to these sorts of social facts is not distinctive of structural contextualism. What the contextualist claims is that facts about the doxastic commitments of one's community are important for epistemic appraisal in general, and for the question of whether or not certain of one's beliefs need justification (on pain of epistemic irresponsibility) in particular. One way of putting this idea with regard to beliefs needing or not needing justification is to say that whether or not one needs justification for

some belief depends (in part) on what one's group will permit one to get away with believing without having a justification.

Of course, there are large and difficult questions looming for the contextualist about this matter of social context sensitivity. Since the contextualist thinks that epistemic evaluation is sensitive to social context, he or she needs to address questions about the sorts of factors that determine the relevant social context for evaluating the epistemic status of an individual's beliefs. We are, after all, members of many groups at any one time, and there are countless ways to individuate groups depending on the purposes at hand. Of course, I seriously doubt that there is an algorithm or completely general and adequate formula that one could use to fix, in a nonarbitrary fashion, the relevant social context in any particular case. Rather, questions about relevant social context are themselves (as you might expect) context sensitive. If this is correct, then we have no choice but to proceed on a case-by-case basis, though doing so does not rule out formulating defeasible generalizations about the sorts of factors that tend to help fix a relevant social group in some specific context.⁴²

Before moving on to questions about moral justification, let me relate the main contextualist themes of this section to the notion of epistemic responsibility sketched in the previous section. One is epistemically responsible vis-à-vis some belief one holds only when one has adequately dealt with those (obvious) counterpossibilities whose seriousness is indicated by one's own background beliefs and those indicated by relevant information widely shared by a relevant community. Those cases in which one holds some belief without having a justifying reason for the belief and in which there are no relevant counterpossibilities of the sort just mentioned are candidate cases in which it seems appropriate to say that one is epistemically permitted and hence responsible in holding that belief. But, in light of the distinction between first-order and second-order conservatism, I think we should add the following proviso to our description of contextually basic beliefs: not only should it be the case that there are no relevant counterpossibilities to the belief in question, but the belief in question, to be properly basic, must also be one that the believer and his or her social group takes to be epistemically sound. The implication about contextually basic beliefs is that their status as basic depends crucially on social context and what sorts of epistemic demands one is expected to meet as well as the group's level of epistemic commitment to the belief in question.

Moral Justification in Context

In this section, I want to articulate and partially defend contextualism about the structure of moral belief.⁴³ My case involves both a descriptive and a normative dimension. First, I am interested in characterizing our actual epistemic practices when it comes to moral belief—in particular, those epistemic practices that bear on being free from or deserving epistemic blame. My

descriptive hypothesis is that our epistemic norms, as they apply to moral belief, do not normally require that epistemically responsible agents have justifying reasons for all of their responsibly held moral beliefs. Some moral beliefs, especially those that are partly constitutive of one's moral outlook, serve as a body of very basic moral assumptions which, in ordinary contexts of moral thought and discussion, are not in need of justification. If this descriptive thesis is correct, then it is correct to characterize the structure of moral justification implied by our epistemic norms as contextual. My normative thesis is that there is good reason to reflectively endorse such norms.

In order to make a case for my descriptive claim, my plan is to describe a picture about our practices of justifying moral beliefs that, although it may not represent a complete picture, is quite familiar. The picture I have in mind is to be found in the writings of W. D. Ross. Once we have the picture before us, I want to indicate briefly some reasons for thinking that we often do reason and think about moral matters as the Rossian picture suggests, and then I will elaborate some of the epistemically relevant features that represent what I will call "the ordinary context of moral thought and discussion." What emerges from the picture is a contextualist account of the structure of justification.

A Cue From Ross

I am inclined to think that some of Ross's views about the nature of justification in ethics are correct (at least with regard to a very familiar pattern of justified moral belief), and I use those views to develop a contextualist picture of justification in ethics—a picture or model that seems to gain some support from recent empirical work. The picture I have in mind features moral rules as providing a basis for the justification of particular moral beliefs. And although I do think that rules have a role to play in a full story about the justification of moral belief, my version of contextualism is not committed to the claim that moral rules are, in all contexts, necessary in accounting for an individual's moral belief being justified.⁴⁴ Thus, the picture to follow is meant only to illustrate my version of ethical contextualism.

Ross, of course, was an ethical foundationalist who advocated a version of ethical pluralism. His specific version of ethical foundationalism involved these two claims: (1) that in ethics, as in mathematics, there are certain "propositions that cannot be proved, but that just as certainly need no proof,"⁴⁵ and (2) such propositions are self-evident necessary truths describing nonnatural moral facts and properties that can be known a priori. His ethical pluralism also involved two central claims: (3) There is a plurality of irreducible midlevel generalizations that express prima facie moral obligations. (These are the propositions that need no proof.) (4) In specific cases, these prima facie moral obligations may conflict, and when they do, there is no procedure, rule, or algorithm by which one may adjudicate these conflicts.

I accept (again, tentatively and with some modification) Ross's claims (1), (3), and (4); what I don't accept is the foundationalist epistemology and associated metaphysics of (2). My idea is that we can rework some of Ross's

views by stripping away the foundationalist epistemology and nonnaturalist metaphysics, and reinterpret the other claims in light of contextualist epistemology. In fact, claims (1), (3), and (4) represent what I take to be a roughly accurate picture of a good part of the structure of justified moral belief—at least for many people in our culture. Embedded in a contextualist moral epistemology, the structural view involves the following four central claims:

- C1: There are a number of irreducible moral generalizations that are defeasible and that we acquire as a result of moral education. In the ordinary context of justification in ethics, these are often epistemically basic.
- C2: However, they are contextually basic: they do not represent self-evident moral truths knowable a priori nor do they result from the deliverance of some faculty of moral intuition. Rather, their status as basic is relative to context in a way to be elaborated below.
- C3: The contextually basic beliefs provide (along with relevant non-moral factual beliefs) the justificatory basis for justified belief in other, nonbasic moral propositions. Thus, (*ceteris paribus*) other, nonbasic moral beliefs are justified if they are appropriately based on some of the contextually basic ones.
- C4: However, going from basic moral beliefs—the midlevel moral generalizations—to more specific moral beliefs about particular cases is not always a matter of simply taking the moral generalization together with relevant empirical information and deducing a moral conclusion. In many cases, two or more morally relevant considerations expressed by the basic moral generalizations will be present in a single case, and for these cases we need have no algorithm or ordering system to which we can appeal to adjudicate the conflict. In these cases, moral *judgment* takes over—something that one can do better or worse but something for which we need not have a covering rule that would dictate what, in particular, it is rational to believe. Nevertheless, in ordinary contexts of moral thought and discussion, individuals can be justified in coming to hold certain moral beliefs in cases calling for moral judgment.

Let me elaborate the view.

Tenets C1 and C3 together comprise a very familiar idea about the structure of ethical justification—a view common to both foundationalism and contextualism. Support for these tenets comes from commonsense observation and from empirical work in moral psychology.

So what does available evidence suggest? If we examine actual bits of human moral reasoning, it is plausible to suppose that doxastic justification in ethics rests with epistemically basic beliefs of some sort. We naturally assume that in honestly stating our reasons for holding some moral belief we

are expressing the epistemically relevant structure of our moral beliefs. And when people are asked to articulate their reasons for holding some particular moral belief about a specific case, they by and large reason according to the familiar pattern of bringing forth general considerations bearing on the specific case that they take to be morally significant in that case. Such considerations are usually formulated as midlevel moral generalizations like, for example: “Lying is wrong” and “Hurting others is wrong.” Moreover, there are two noteworthy features of these mid-level moral generalizations. First, when asked about them, people by and large report that such claims strike them as intuitively *obvious*. Related to this bit of phenomenology is the fact that people treat these generalizations as being *nonarbitrary*. That is, in ordinary contexts, most people are not inclined to take challenges to these beliefs at all seriously—they represent a person’s moral bottom line. These facts suggest that many people don’t have justifying reasons for these bottom-line moral beliefs.⁴⁶ (As I explain below, this does not mean that one can not detach from one’s moral beliefs, hold them at arm’s length, in order to raise Nietzschean questions about one’s own moral outlook. But this does not affect the point I am making here about moral phenomenology or its bearing on contextualism.) I base these remarks on the observations I have made listening to students (who have not been tainted by an introductory course in normative ethics), but also we have the observations reported by, for example, the authors of *Habits of the Heart* as well as empirical research on moral development by, for example, Carol Gilligan.⁴⁷

One of the interviewees featured in *Habits of the Heart* (quoted in the second epigraph), when asked about some of his general moral beliefs that he was using to justify more particular moral beliefs, gave what I suspect would be a pretty typical answer: he was dumbfounded by the question and took his general moral beliefs in question to be obvious. Another sort of response to questions about a person’s general moral beliefs is to be found in Gilligan’s work. The responses she tended to get from subjects when they were asked to provide a rationale for those general moral beliefs typically used by them to justify more particular moral beliefs were, as Dreyfus and Dreyfus point out, “tautologies and banalities, e.g., that they try to act in such a way as to make the world a better place to live. They might as well say that their highest moral principle is ‘do something good.’”⁴⁸ My reading of all this (not that it is the only reading) is that in many contexts at least there are moral beliefs—general moral beliefs—that provide the basis for one coming to justifiably hold other moral beliefs, but beliefs for which most ordinary people have no (justifying) reason. In these (rather typical cases), I don’t think it is plausible to criticize such agents for being epistemically irresponsible. They have particular moral beliefs that rest for their justification on certain other moral beliefs that represent the core of their moral sensibility. Moreover, they take these beliefs to be obvious and nonarbitrary and so display the relevant sort of second-order doxastic commitment characteristic of what I am calling contextually basic beliefs. There is, of course, much more to say about all this (including the addition of some important qualifications), but

my suggestion here is that reflection on these ordinary cases helps reveal something important about our epistemic norms when it comes to moral belief, namely, that in what I am calling “ordinary contexts of moral thought and discussion” one need not have justifying reasons or grounds for certain moral beliefs that play a crucial epistemic role in one being justified in holding other moral beliefs.

Contextually Basic Moral Beliefs

Claim C2 is what distinguishes contextualism about structure from foundationalism. As we have seen, the contextualist maintains the following two claims.⁴⁹ (1) In ordinary contexts of doxastic justification, epistemically basic beliefs *are not in need of justification*. (2) Beliefs that are basic in one context may, in a different context, require justification. What follows is an elaboration of these two claims. In taking up the first claim, we must clarify the notion of *context* (as I use it here). We must also say something about the role of contextually basic beliefs in ordinary contexts of moral thought and discussion.

I will begin by focusing on ordinary, engaged contexts of moral thinking—contexts in which we bring to bear on some moral question or issue a moral outlook—and I will fill out some of the epistemically important detail of this context. With regard to moral belief, then, an important part of the context when it comes to questions about being justified in holding various moral beliefs involves the role of one’s moral outlook. What is a moral outlook?

A moral outlook represents a way of viewing and responding to one’s environment from a moral point of view; it is a perspective from which one takes a moral stance. One comes to have a moral outlook through a process of moral education, where some of the more salient features of this process include: (1) developing a sensitivity to various features of one’s environment that, according to the particular outlook being taught, are morally relevant and so the basis of moral evaluation; (2) learning to associate various emotional responses with objects of moral evaluation (e.g., learning to have feelings of guilt and resentment toward certain of one’s own actions and the actions of others); (3) becoming acquainted with certain *exemplars*, that is, paradigmatic cases of moral or immoral actions, persons, institutions and so forth⁵⁰; (4) learning moral generalizations that encapsulate the most important morally relevant features to which, through training, one develops a sensitivity; and (5) learning basic patterns of moral reasoning (e.g., golden rule/reversibility reasoning as well as learning to reason from moral generalizations to particular cases). As a result of these learning activities, then, one comes to acquire a battery of interrelated skills, beliefs, emotional responses, and so forth that constitute an individual’s moral outlook.

Having some particular moral outlook provides (part of) the “context” within which one ordinarily comes to have justified moral beliefs. But notice that in normal cases it is a richly social context—moral education takes place within a certain social environment, normally a large community whose mem-

bers more or less share certain moral values and beliefs. In what I am calling engaged moral contexts, where one brings one's moral outlook to bear on some specific case calling for a moral response, certain moral beliefs—what I am calling midlevel moral generalizations—often enough play a special justifying role, and it is by seeing how these moral beliefs function in one's moral outlook that we can understand more clearly the epistemic status of those beliefs. Let us then consider the role of midlevel general moral beliefs in a moral outlook.

The five features of a moral outlook represent (at least part of) what we might call “formal” features of a moral outlook; features that characterize any (or most any) moral outlook. But particular moral outlooks differ in content, and one useful way to characterize some *particular* moral outlook, and distinguish it from other moral outlooks, is in terms of those morally relevant features mentioned in (1) and (4). Let us say, then, that those morally relevant features of actions, persons, institutions, and so forth that represent (according to the outlook) the most fundamental morally relevant features of things that are the basis of moral evaluation, are distinctive of that particular moral outlook. Midlevel moral generalizations, as I am understanding them, connect those morally relevant features of things with terms of moral evaluation. Hence, we can say that a set of these midlevel generalizations is (partly) *constitutive* of a particular moral outlook. Thus, in many ordinary, engaged contexts of moral thinking about specific moral questions and issues, these general moral beliefs help structure and organize our moral experience and thought—we think in terms of them. When our focus is on specific issues, they are part of a large body of assumptions that we employ in our thinking. Moreover, such moral beliefs in such contexts are taken for granted: no serious doubts or challenges are considered or taken seriously by the relevant community. Since a large part of being epistemically responsible is a matter of being able to detect and deal with “relevant” challenges, and in the ordinary context of moral justification, challenges to midlevel moral generalizations are not relevant, one's holding such beliefs and basing other, nonbasic beliefs on them is not subject to epistemic criticism and so one is epistemically responsible in holding them without having justifying reasons.

So, if I am right, our actual epistemic norms and practices do not, as a matter of fact, require that individuals have justifying reasons for some of their moral beliefs—moral beliefs that often play a crucial epistemic role when it comes to being inferentially justified in holding specific moral beliefs.

Context Sensitivity

The second feature of contextually basic beliefs to be considered here is the idea that being basic is context-sensitive and so what is basic in one context may not be basic in another. Let us begin by considering different social contexts involving different communities having and inculcating different moral outlooks. Although one would expect that most any two moral outlooks would share many of the same basic moral assumptions (e.g., presumptions

against killing humans, theft, and so forth), there may be some differences in the specific moral assumptions that these groups by and large take for granted, as well as the moral weight that is attached to the various morally relevant considerations the rules encapsulate.⁵¹ If so, then one way in which being basic is context-sensitive is simply that different groups may take (some) different moral beliefs for granted. For example, in comparing the basic moral outlook of the Amish culture with the outlooks of many non-Amish Westerners, we see striking differences.⁵² The underlying spirit of the Amish moral outlook—what is called *Gelassenheit*, translated as “submission”—puts primary emphasis on the values of submission and obedience to God and community as fundamental for leading a morally proper life. The moral requirement to lead a properly submissive life (which the Amish take as basic and applying to *all* persons) is understood to imply that individual achievement, self-fulfillment, personal recognition, and other manifestations of the modern spirit of individuality are morally perverse. Even if submissiveness and obedience are morally valued by people generally, nevertheless, these values need not and often do not have the sort of fundamental status and importance that they have in the Amish moral outlook. Amish justifications for specific moral beliefs about actions and practices rest with claims to the effect that such and such actions and practices are required (or forbidden) by *Gelassenheit*. So, one rather obvious way in which beliefs that do not need justification are context-sensitive is where talk of different social contexts refers to different communities with differing moral outlooks.

A more interesting possibility to explore is the extent to which our epistemic evaluations might be context-sensitive in a manner that would imply that an individual might be epistemically responsible in holding some moral belief without justification in one context, though not responsible in holding that same belief in a different context—where differences in context here involve different social groups. Of course, over time an individual may come to have a moral outlook whose basic moral assumptions differ markedly from the assumptions of his former moral outlook (perhaps as a result of a radical moral conversion not mediated by argumentation).⁵³ In some ways, this sort of case is like the one described in the previous paragraph: there are two distinct moral outlooks creating two distinct contexts. But even for an individual whose moral outlook remains relatively unchanged over a period of time, and for whom certain moral beliefs are basic in ordinary, engaged contexts of moral thought and deliberation, there may be special contexts in which those moral beliefs are not basic. One kind of case fitting this description is a context in which one is confronted with skeptical challenges to one’s moral outlook—challenges that are aimed at those moral beliefs, which in engaged contexts, are contextually basic. Let me spell out the kind of case I have in mind in a bit more detail.

Let us distinguish between what I have called an engaged context of moral thought and a detached context in which one is not thinking and deliberating entirely from within her or his moral outlook but is instead looking at it from the outside, as it were. Now, in an engaged context of moral thinking, where

skeptical challenges to that outlook are not in focus, one is (*ceteris paribus*) epistemically responsible in holding (without justification) those basic moral beliefs and assumptions more or less fundamental to the outlook. However, once skeptical challenges are taken seriously, then the context has been switched (in the sense that the relevant social group or community crucial for epistemic evaluation is the group of skeptics). In this relatively detached context in which, we are supposing, the core moral assumptions of one's moral outlook are being challenged, those ordinarily basic moral beliefs are no longer basic. For example, suppose we are considering skeptical challenges to the deepest aspects of a person's moral outlook, and imagine that this person is confronted by a group of Nietzscheans who argue, in effect, that democratically structured societies produce a false moral conscience and that therefore many of the moral beliefs taken for granted in such societies are mistaken or at least questionable. In such detached contexts, what often seems to happen is that the epistemic norms operative in them differ from those operative in engaged contexts; in particular, in contexts of the former sort, one is not permitted to take for granted the moral beliefs that one may take for granted in contexts of the latter sort. The reason for the difference in epistemic norms governing these contexts is fairly obvious. In engaged contexts, where the point and purpose of the context is (speaking roughly) to negotiate one's way around in a social world, one is not required to have reasons (so I have argued) for certain moral beliefs that are fundamental to the outlook. In detached contexts, where the point and purpose of the context is to examine one's moral outlook in an effort, for example, to detect and correct any cultural or idiosyncratic biases, one is not allowed to take one's core moral beliefs and assumptions as basic.

Cases fitting this general description in which one enters a detached context raise interesting questions about the conditions under which it becomes appropriate or perhaps required to enter such a context as well as questions about the sorts of epistemic norms operative in such contexts. Investigating these matters would require that we consider specific cases in some detail, which we cannot pursue here.

Moral Judgment

We come finally to tenet C4. According to the version of structural contextualism I am articulating, basic moral beliefs often provide the justificatory basis for other, inferentially justified beliefs. Often, talk of inference is taken to be a matter of deductive connections between statements or beliefs. But a realistic account of moral reasoning must, I think, recognize Ross's claim that in many instances, moral reasoning does not follow a simple deductive pattern, in fact, in many instances such reasoning is not governed by rules that dictate what in particular it is rational to believe. Ross's view has been the subject of philosophical dissatisfaction partly because he refused to provide any algorithm or general procedure for arriving at justified moral beliefs in cases where

two more morally relevant considerations are present and at least one of them supports one moral evaluation of the action and at least one of the others supports an opposing moral evaluation. The problem is supposed to be that unless there is some general covering rule or procedure that is to be followed in coming to some overall moral evaluation about the action, then any resulting moral judgment on the agent's part will be arbitrary and hence unjustified.

I think Ross is right about how we often *do* reason about moral matters: we work with a handful of irreducible midlevel moral generalizations that cannot be lexically ordered so as to provide a super rule for adjudicating conflicts among the generalizations. Nevertheless, moral thought and deliberation that is not rule-governed in this way often yields moral beliefs that one is justified in holding. For instance, with issues such as abortion (where various relevant considerations pull in opposite moral directions) people reason about the morality of that practice (or specific instances of it) using basically the same stock of general midlevel moral beliefs, even though individuals can differ in their moral assessment of this practice and be justified in their differing individual responses. Moreover, in addition to cases of conflicting moral generalizations, there are many cases in which it is unclear whether or not some moral generalization correctly applies to a particular case. After all, moral generalizations are expressed in terms of such notions as *harm*, *lying*, *innocent person*, and so forth, that are vague. Like cases of conflict, these cases of application require that what I am calling *moral judgment* play an important epistemic role in coming to have justified moral beliefs. What we must do, then, is square our moral epistemology with these facts.

There are both philosophical and empirical considerations that support my contention that non-rule-based moral thinking can yield justified moral belief. The main philosophical consideration has to do with the recent work of some philosophers on the notion of rationality. Harold Brown, for instance, has recently criticized what he calls the "traditional" conception of rationality according to which all rational belief is belief according to some rule. Brown persuasively argues that the traditional view involves an impossible ideal implying that even rigorous scientific inquiry must be counted as irrational. What Brown proposes is a new model of rationality, one that makes a place for what he simply calls *judgment*: "the ability to evaluate a situation, assess evidence, and come to a reasonable decision without following rules."⁵⁴ So this general model of rationality that assigns a significant epistemic role to judgment comports well with the view that scientific inquiry is rational, and also comports well with the claim that weighing up competing moral considerations and, on the basis of this weighing, making a judgment (which is not a matter of conforming to some specifiable rule) can result in rational or justified belief. I suspect that one of the reasons philosophers have been so unsympathetic to Ross is because they take science as our paradigm of rational inquiry, assume that such inquiry is completely rule-governed, and so conclude that on a view like Ross's, moral thinking has to be epistemically defective. This line of thought is thoroughly undermined by Brown. Indeed, if Brown is right,

then the role of moral judgment in coming to have justified moral beliefs is not some isolated and otherwise epistemically queer phenomenon peculiar to moral thinking, but merely an instance of a quite general phenomenon.

The relevant empirical consideration bearing on this issue can be found in the work of the Dreyfus brothers. They argue that moral thinking and judging are activities much like many physical and intellectual activities (they discuss driving a car and playing chess) in that doing them well is a skill that develops through stages. When starting out, a novice chess player is taught to consciously follow rules that, with experience, are no longer consciously entertained, until eventually one can just “see” how to react to the various types of chess positions. Their main point, which they apply to the case of moral reasoning, is that an individual’s becoming increasingly adept at some complex activity involves acquiring a skill—coming to *know how* to do something, where one does not consciously rely on rules (which is not to say that rules play no justificatory role at all in coming to have justified moral beliefs about specific cases). But they make a further Rossian point, namely, that adept moral judgment and reasoning in complex cases, where a number of morally relevant considerations come into play, is not grounded in any algorithm or super rule that would rationally determine some outcome. They write:

[I]f the phenomenology of skillful coping we have presented is right, principles and theories serve only for early stages of learning; no principle or theory “ground” an expert ethical response, any more than in chess there is a theory or rule that explains a master-level move. As we have seen in the case of chess, recognizing that there is no way to ground one’s intuitions in an explanation is an important step on the way to acquiring expertise.⁵⁵

The phenomenology of moral thinking that the Dreyfus brothers present supports the Rossian view which emphasizes the role of moral judgment in coming to make reasonable moral decisions, and in coming to have justified moral beliefs.

These remarks about moral judgment comport well with my contextualist moral epistemology. In cases where an expert moral thinker mulls over some issue and comes to a belief about the morality of some action or whatever, he or she is engaged in an activity of weighing and balancing various morally relevant considerations—considerations reflected in his or her general moral beliefs that I have been saying are contextually basic. The moral belief he or she eventually settles on is not dictated by any algorithm she or he has; trained moral judgement is operative here. Nevertheless, the expert is reasoning about the case and can, if asked, state those reasons that, in the end, were decisive. Of course, at bottom, his or her reasons are represented by midlevel moral beliefs. So, after the fact, our expert can provide a justification for his or her belief terminating in his or her midlevel moral beliefs, but there is no covering rule followed dictating that one sort of general moral consideration should trump competing moral considerations in this case. What this reveals about those epistemic norms governing moral belief is that we operate according to

epistemic norms some of which permit one to hold moral beliefs, in certain circumstances, on the basis of an exercise of one's moral judgment.⁵⁶

A Brief Rationale

I have been claiming that my contextualist picture is more or less descriptively accurate, at least if we are focused on questions about epistemically responsible moral belief. But even if I am right in my descriptive claim about how our practices work, do we have good reason to endorse our practices? Can we provide a rationale for having norms and practices that are like the one's we have? Here, we turn from descriptive questions to normative ones.

Space does not allow that we pursue methodological issues in any detail, but I shall assume that judging the overall adequacy of an epistemological theory is a matter of that theory's globally cohering with assumptions, views, and theories from common sense and other fields of inquiry. Specifically, there are two dimensions to this sort of holism worth sorting out. First, one would like one's moral epistemology to comport with commonsense assumptions about matters epistemic such as the presumption that many people (at least sometimes) justifiably believe certain moral propositions. Second, one wants the commitments and implications of one's epistemology to comport with any relevant assumptions, theories, and results from empirical fields such as psychology, biology, and anthropology.⁵⁷ Of course, evaluating epistemological theories is a comparative matter. One hopes to show that one's favored epistemological theory does a better job, vis-à-vis any competitors, at satisfying the relevant desiderata.

Though I will not argue the case here, let me just conjecture that my contextualist view comports better than do rival views with such commonsense presumptions as that ordinary persons are often epistemically responsible in many of the moral beliefs they hold. I suspect that these rival epistemological views, whatever virtues they may have, tend to impose epistemic burdens on ordinary believers that would imply that such believers are not generally responsible in many of the moral beliefs they hold.⁵⁸ So I think contextualism is more plausible than its rivals with regard to the first desideratum of any moral epistemology.

I also think that my contextualist epistemology comports nicely with certain empirical data about human beings. Specifically, what I have in mind is the sort of pragmatic rationale hinted at above in the second section in defense of an "in-between" requirement governing our responsibility for dealing with counterpossibilities. In connection with the requirement in question I noted that given our "finitary predicament," including the fact that we are beings with limited cognitive resources, limited time, and other, nonepistemic goals, we would expect that the sorts of epistemic norms in everyday operation would impose the sort of "in-between" level of care for checking counterpossibilities we explored earlier. Moreover, viewing epistemic norms from this pragmatic perspective makes sense of the fact that our epistemic norms by

and large have an “innocent until proven guilty” bias to them, a conservative leaning that goes to the heart of my contextualism.⁵⁹ If this is right, then since there does not seem to be any special reason for supposing that epistemic requirements attaching to moral belief are different in this respect from those attaching to nonmoral beliefs, the sort of pragmatic rationale described earlier applies to the moral cases as well.

Concluding Promissory Note

I have tried to make a case for the plausibility of a contextualist epistemology within the realm of moral belief. After sorting and clarifying various contextualist theses, I proceeded to characterize a model epistemic agent that is appropriate for everyday, epistemic evaluation of ordinary people. On the basis of this model, I proceeded to outline a version of contextualism about the structure of responsible moral belief. Let me close by making a partial list of some tasks that lie ahead if one wants to fully defend this view.

First, there are notions that play a significant role in my view that I have left largely unclarified. For instance, more must be said about the notion of context and how one’s so-called social context is determined for specific epistemic evaluations.

Second, I have indicated where some of the key contextualist claims require more defense than I have provided. I suspect, for instance, that more needs to be done by way of supporting the thesis of epistemological conservatism. The same goes for the thesis of epistemic adequacy, according to which nonjustified but responsibly held beliefs can serve as an adequate basis for coming to justifiedly hold other moral beliefs.⁶⁰

Third, there are various questions that come to mind about this sort of view, questions that become the basis for objections: “Does not this view just amount to a version of epistemological relativism (normative contextualism) and so implies that even people with crazy moral beliefs, who have undergone a process of “moral” education, will be epistemically responsible in holding outrageous moral beliefs?” “If the view is not, strictly speaking, a version of relativism, will it not still have the same normative implications as a no-holds-barred version of epistemic relativism?” “Furthermore, even if the view avoids the problems just mentioned, does it not follow that the view is guilty of an unacceptable kind of epistemological dogmatism since the perspective of the model epistemic agent is based on *our* (largely shared) epistemic sensibility, which may not be shared by other groups but which we use to evaluate the beliefs of other groups?”

Finally, as mentioned at the end of the last section, a full defense of a contextualist moral epistemology would require that I show that alternative epistemological views are less plausible than my own. I have only hinted at reasons for making such an assertion.

I am optimistic about responding to the misgivings, filling out the arguments, and filling in the important details. But a more comprehensive attempt must wait for another occasion.⁶¹

Notes

I wish to thank the audience at the conference on Moral Epistemology (Dartmouth College, September 29–October 2, 1994) for a very helpful discussion of my paper. I am especially indebted to Robert Audi, Denny Bradshaw, Malia Brink, Michael DePaul, Michael Gorr, Mitch Haney, David Henderson, Terry Horgan, Stefan Sencerz, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Bill Throop, John Tienson, and Bill Tolhurst for many comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

1. Interviewee featured in R. N. Bellah, R. Madson, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swindler, and S. M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 6.

2. I develop a view about the semantics and metaphysics of moral discourse in my *Morality Without Foundations* (forthcoming), chapter 4.

3. Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976), 771–91.

4. Stewart Cohen, "Knowledge and Context," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), 579.

5. For instance, it is at least initially plausible to suppose that whether or not a long-forgotten defeater *d* of evidence *e*—evidence otherwise adequate for justifiably believing some true proposition *p* and on the basis of which one currently believes *p*—undermines one's knowledge of *p* depends on facts about the normal memory abilities of one's social group. If no normal member of one's group would remember *d*, then the fact that one used to possess a defeater of *e* does not undermine one's knowledge of *p*. See Stewart Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards," *Synthese* 73 (1987), 3–26, for a discussion of the cases of memory and perception.

6. Ernest Sosa, "How Do You Know?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1974), 117; cf. Ernest Sosa, "Knowledge in Context: Skepticism in Doubt," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988), 139–55.

7. Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10 n. 14, is explicit about this. So we can think of Cohen and Sosa as proposing what they take to be universally correct epistemic principles that imply that the truth of certain specific epistemic appraisals is dependent on facts (including social facts) about one's circumstances.

8. Foundationalists sometimes talk about foundational beliefs not being in need of justification, by which they mean that such beliefs, because they are, for example, "self-justifying," do not need to receive justification from other beliefs. The structural contextualist, however, means something more radical here, namely, there are certain beliefs that, in certain contexts at least, need not have the sort of epistemic status of enjoying positive evidential support (either inherently or from other beliefs and experiences) in order to play a regress-stopping role in the structure of justified belief. For recent defenses of structural contextualism with regard to empirical belief, see David Annis, "A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978), 213–19; Michael Williams, "Coherence, Justification and

Truth," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1980), 243–72, and David Henderson, "Epistemic Competence and Contextualist Epistemology: Why Contextualism Is Not Just the Poor Person's Coherentism," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994), 627–49.

9. Inferential justification must be distinguished from the process of psychologically inferring one proposition from another. Moreover, such justification does not require any such process of inferring. See Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 19–20, for discussion of this point.

10. Of course the contextualist will deny any claim by the foundationalist that having a foundational belief (as the foundationalist conceives of them) is *necessary* for having any justified beliefs at all. And likewise the contextualist will deny any claim by the coherentist that having a maximally coherent set of beliefs is *necessary* for having any justified beliefs at all.

11. Arguably, the same holds for ascriptions of knowledge.

12. It is important to distinguish between what we might call *actual doxastic justification* and *hypothetical doxastic justification*. The former refers to cases where: (1) one has adequate (and undefeated) evidence *e* that justifies the belief that *p*, (2) one believes that *p*, and (3) one believes that *p* on the basis of *e*. Cases in which one is not actually but only hypothetically justified are those cases in which clause (1) holds but either (2) or (3) (or both) fail to hold; given one's evidence or grounds, one would be justified in holding a certain belief were one to base that belief on one's evidence or grounds. I am primarily interested in questions of actual doxastic justification. Some discussion of this distinction can be found in Robert Audi, *Belief, Justification, and Knowledge* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1988), 1–2, though he uses the terms *belief justification* and *situational justification* for what I am calling actual and hypothetical doxastic justification respectively.

13. Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics* (New York: Atheneum, 1961).

14. Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

15. Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

16. Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

17. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

18. R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

19. For more on the distinction between questions about doxastic justification and questions about nondoxastic justification in ethics, see Norman Daniels, "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979), 257 n. 1; David Copp, "Considered Judgments and Moral Justification: Conservatism in Moral Theory," in D. Copp and D. Zimmerman, eds., *Morality, Reason, and Truth* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1984), 143; and Mark Timmons, "Foundationalism and the Structure of Justification in Ethics" *Ethics* 97 (1987), 598–99.

20. Of course, questions about nondoxastic justification are relevant to questions about doxastic justification at least to this extent: if, for example, moral propositions or claims can be proved, demonstrated, or 'justified' by inferring them from, say, propositions about the nature of human beings, then one way to be doxastically justified in holding various moral beliefs would be to infer them from the relevant set of

(justifiably held) beliefs about the nature of human beings. But this need not be the only way, or even the primary way, in which most ordinary people come to justifiably hold moral beliefs. See, for example, William Tolhurst, "Supervenience, Externalism, and Moral Knowledge," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29, supplementary volume on "Moral Realism" (1986), 43–55, and his example of Amazing Grace.

21. In addition to goals and perspective, Foley, *Working Without a Net* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), claims that epistemic evaluations are to be understood as also making reference to what he calls a set of resources possessed by the believer. Foley offers this formula, then, for understanding ascriptions of rationality: "It is rational for you to believe _____ because you have resources R and because from perspective P it seems that, given R, believing _____ is an effective way to satisfy goal G" (p. 34).

22. We understand justified belief in terms of *apparently* promoting your goals instead of saying, for example, that they must *in fact* satisfy your goals because even in cases where your beliefs do not satisfy your goals, we want to allow that you can still be justified in holding the belief.

23. This matter is not so clear in Foley. Judging from some perspective involves judging relative to the epistemic standards that partially characterize the perspective in question. Although not explicit about the matter, from what he does say, Foley seems to think that the epistemic standards of a perspective are represented as beliefs (perspectives, after all, are defined as sets of beliefs). I suspect that a better way to construe a perspective would not be simply in terms of beliefs, but we need not get into this issue here.

24. Foley, *Working Without a Net*, p. 14. This implies, of course, that epistemic ascriptions are context sensitive—a claim embraced by epistemological contextualists. However, it will become clear as we proceed that one may grant that epistemic evaluations are contextual in the ways implied by Foley's schema without being the sort of contextualist about structure that I will be defending.

25. Two comments are in order here: First, it is probably too simplistic to suppose that there is a single epistemic goal—having true beliefs and avoiding false ones. Foley, (*Working Without a Net*, p. 19), for example, characterizes a purely epistemic summum bonum as the having of a current system of "accurate and comprehensive" belief. Michael DePaul, *Balance and Refinement: Beyond Coherence Methods of Moral Inquiry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), chapter 2, argues that we should recognize that in addition to having true beliefs and avoiding false ones, our epistemic summum bonum includes having a belief system that is both "rational" and "warranted." Out of mere convenience, I shall keep on describing our epistemic goal in the simpler way. Second, given that I am interested in a notion of epistemic justification, I am thus committed to a meta-ethical view that allows for truth to be properly predicated of moral sentences. However, the view about moral truth that I accept is intended to mesh with a metaphysically irrealist stance about moral discourse. For an elaboration of a particular view about moral truth, which construes truth talk as predicated of moral propositions in a *minimalist* spirit, see Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, "Taking a Moral Stance," forthcoming, and Timmons, *Morality Without Foundations*.

26. It might appear, then, that I am interested in evaluations made from a sociocentric perspective and, in particular, the epistemic perspective of one's group (however I propose to understand talk of "one's group"). In a sense, this is what interests me, but I want to avoid a particular misunderstanding of what I am up to.

First, we need to notice that there are two importantly different types of epistemic evaluation that employ a sociocentric perspective. First, some sociocentric-based evalu-

ations invoke the epistemic perspective of *the believer's* community whatever community that may turn out to be. We might call sociocentric evaluations of this sort *ecumenical* in spirit; they represent a familiar relativist stance in epistemology or what I earlier called normative contextualism. But in other contexts, invoking a sociocentric perspective may be *sectarian* in spirit. That is, for some purposes, we may be interested in epistemically evaluating an agent's belief from the point of view of the *attributor's* epistemic perspective, which, of course, for us includes those epistemic norms that we endorse. Now, in focusing on the imaginary perspective of a representative epistemically responsible believer, I am interested in epistemic evaluations that reflect what I take to be *our* most general and widely employed epistemic norms, and so I am interested in evaluations that are sectarian in spirit.

Second, I construe my task as partly descriptive; the epistemic norms employed by the competent epistemic agent are norms that by and large characterize our current epistemic practice. But I also think that the sorts of general epistemic norms I have in mind—norms that ordinarily govern, in a most general way, the epistemically relevant tasks of gathering evidence and checking for counterpossibilities to claims we believe or are entertaining—are norms that stand up to critical scrutiny and thus represent norms that we would want to reflectively endorse. Insofar as they represent norms we would want to reflectively endorse, they represent those norms that we think *should* be used in epistemic evaluation and thus are the basis for nonrelativized, categorical epistemic ascriptions.

27. Actually, responsibilities having to do with gathering evidence seem, for the most part, to derive from responsibilities for dealing with relevant counterpossibilities. Moreover, the sorts of norms governing the elimination of internal inconsistencies are similar in form to those for eliminating counterpossibilities. See C. Cherniak, *Minimal Rationality* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1986), chapter 1.

28. See Cherniak, *Minimal Rationality*, chapter 5, for a defense of a similar principle that he calls the "special reasons requirement." Much of my discussion of epistemic responsibility is influenced by Cherniak.

29. Talk of "counterpossibilities whose seriousness is indicated by one's current background beliefs" needs clarification. But here I will have to rely on the reader's intuitive understanding of this talk.

30. W. P. Keeton, D. B. Dobbs, R. E. Keeton, and D. G. Owen, *Prosser and Keeton on The Law of Torts*, 5th ed., (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1984), 175.

31. Cherniak, *Minimal Rationality*, chapter 2.

32. See Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards."

33. Keeton et al., *The Law of Torts*, p. 184.

34. J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, eds., J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 84.

35. See Sosa, "How Do You Know?" and "Knowledge in Context."

36. Of course, what counts as a "reasonable" amount of time is context-sensitive, and will depend on such factors as how important it is to have correct beliefs about some subject matter on some occasion as well as one's occupation (one's level of care in dealing with counterpossibilities will be higher than normal if one is a member of a special profession whose job it is to gain accurate information about some subject matter).

37. C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 5.358.

38. My discussion of epistemic conservatism, including the distinction between first-order and second-order species of the view follows Jonathan Kvanvig, "Conservatism and Its Virtues," *Synthese* 79 (1989), 153–63.

39. Here I am being intentionally noncommittal about what other requirements (if any) might be involved in a notion of responsible belief for which one has no justification. For example, one might require that someone or other in one's community has justifying reasons for the proposition in question and that the possibility of nonjustified responsible belief reflects one of the ways in which our epistemic practices indicate a kind of division of epistemic labor.

40. Robert Audi suggested to me that the defender of conservatism need not demand that believers possess second-order beliefs, and instead can get by with the requirement that believers be immediately disposed to have the relevant sort of second-order belief. I excuse myself from fussing with the details of an adequate formulation of second-order conservatism.

41. Kvanvig, "Conservatism and Its Virtues."

42. As indicated note 36, one obvious factor that figures importantly in our epistemic evaluations concerns one's special knowledge and skills—knowledge and skills that may or may not be tied to one's occupation. According to the reasonable person doctrine from law as described in Keeton et al., *The Law of Torts*, "Professional persons in general, and those who undertake any work calling for special skill, are required not only to exercise reasonable care in what they do, but also to possess a minimum of special knowledge and ability" (p. 185). This suggests that we rightly expect more of people who have special knowledge or who are members of occupations whose job it is to know more about certain topics.

43. Carl Wellman, *Challenge and Response* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971); Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Jeffrey Stout, "On Having a Morality in Common," in *Prospects for a Common Morality*, eds. G. Outka and J. P. Reeder (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993) profess some version or other of structural contextualism about moral belief. In my "Moral Justification in Context," *The Monist* 76 (1993), 360–78, I defend this view, but do so from an egocentric epistemic perspective, whereas in this paper my focus is on a nonegocentric perspective.

44. So, for example, in specific contexts, the justification of a moral belief may involve an ultimate appeal to moral exemplars, or perhaps instead just an appeal to the particularities of some specific case under scrutiny, and moral rules may play no role at all. I am here thinking of the epistemological views of so-called moral *particularists*. See, for example, Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), chapters 4–7). My contextualism can allow that the sorts of belief that play a contextually basic role in the justification of moral belief is itself a contextually variable matter.

45. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 30.

46. As Walter Sinnott-Armstrong pointed out to me, from the fact that people do not take certain challenges seriously does not show that they have no reasons or justification for the belief being challenged; in some cases, we do not take challenges to certain beliefs seriously because of having overwhelming justifying reasons for those beliefs. However, as I go on to explain, I think part of the reason for not taking certain challenges seriously in the case of moral belief is that ordinary people do not have justifying reasons for those beliefs.

47. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in *Women and Moral Theory*, eds. E. F. Kittay and D. T. Meyers (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988); and Carol Gilligan, J. V. Ward, J. M. Taylor, and B. Bardige, *Mapping the Moral Domain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

48. Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, "What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of Ethical Expertise," in *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, ed. D. Rasmussen (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), 252.

49. Here I am just concerned with what I have called the thesis of epistemic conservatism and the thesis of social-context sensitivity. The thesis of epistemic adequacy does not figure in this discussion.

50. Thomas Kuhn, "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," in *The Essential Tension*, ed. Kuhn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), uses the term "exemplar" to refer to one of the crucial ingredients involved in what he calls a *disciplinary matrix*—those elements shared by a scientific community that enable them to communicate professionally and arrive at nearly unanimous judgments on scientific questions. As part of a disciplinary matrix, exemplars are "concrete problem solutions accepted by the group as, in a quite usual sense, paradigmatic" (p. 298). Learning a moral outlook involves, I am suggesting, a rough equivalent of learning a disciplinary matrix.

51. Here I skip over important complexities that would need to be considered before we could confidently say that all or most communities share many of the same basic moral assumptions. As Francis Snare, "The Diversity of Morals," *Mind* 89 (1980), 353–69, argues, the scope and importance that certain moral rules have in different cultures signifies real differences in the moral values and associated moral rules of those cultures. So, for example, merely from the fact that two cultures subscribe to a prohibition on lying does not mean that they both accept the same moral rule about lying.

52. See Donald G. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) for a detailed description of Amish culture.

53. See DePaul, *Balance and Refinement*, pp. 39–48 for a description of such radical moral conversions that result from a "discontinuous" shift in one's moral outlook.

54. Harold Brown, *Rationality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 137. This same theme is stressed by Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), in connection with explaining the success of science. He points out that attempts to formalize scientific method have not worked and are not going to work, and so we should get over what he calls "method fetishism" in trying to make sense of scientific rationality. Rather, according to Putnam, scientists work with a set of nonalgorithmic, informal "maxims" that require "informal rationality, i.e., intelligence and common sense, to apply" (p. 195).

55. Dreyfus and Dreyfus, "What is Morality?" p. 252.

56. Of course, there is much to say about moral judgment and what makes such judgment *good* judgment even if it is not rule-governed. Space does not permit treatment of this topic here, but the importance of *exemplars* (mentioned above in describing a moral outlook) figures importantly here. Good moral judgment is judgment that one would expect the moral experts to make. This is the sort of story we find in Brown, *Rationality*, and in Dreyfus and Dreyfus, "What is Morality?," which, as the Dreyfus brothers point out, is circular, but (they claim) not viciously so.

57. Here, the claim that descriptive work in the sciences should influence epistemological theorizing represents a so-called naturalized approach to epistemology, one that insists that sound epistemological theorizing must draw on relevant work in the sciences. See, for example, Hilary Kornblith, "Introduction: What Is Naturalistic Epistemology?" in *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2d ed., ed. Hilary Kornblith (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1–14.

58. See Gilbert Harman, *Change in View* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1986), chapter 2, and "Positive versus Negative Undermining in Belief Revision," in

Naturalizing Epistemology, ed. Kornblith, for this sort of complaint aimed at foundationalism; and see Henderson, “Epistemic Competence and Contextualist Epistemology,” for this sort of complaint aimed at coherentism. Henderson’s discussion is particularly useful in this connection because he argues that contextualism (with regard to empirical belief) is not just, as he says, a “poor person’s coherentism.”

59. See Foley, *Working Without a Net*, chapter 3, for discussion of the sort of rationale for the notion of epistemic responsibility I am concerned with here.

60. I thank Stefan Sencerz and Michael DePaul for pressing me on the connection between my notion of responsible belief and the notion of justified belief operative in my thinking. I am afraid I must leave this part of my story for another occasion.

61. I take up these matters in my *Morality Without Foundations*, chapter 5.