Introduction

> If there is a coherent specialty lying in this interdisciplinary space . . . it may have to be done by marginal scholars who are willing to be incompetent in a number of fields at once. . . .
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> —Donald Campbell, "Evolutionary Epistemology"[1]

A human being unable to recognize that something is a fact independent of how good or bad or beautiful or useful or just or satisfying it is would be in serious trouble. Dead, actually, unless cared for or directed by others. But a human being not capable of recognizing that some fact, or even a potential or possible fact, was or would be useful or good or bad or beautiful or just or satisfying would be in just as much trouble. Dead again.

Vines are not like that, nor are cameras. Vines grow if exposed to water, minerals, and sunlight. They don't perceive or recognize or represent their environments. They don't have to. They have needs, and when energy or chemicals hit their surfaces, they respond or develop to take advantage of these good things. That's what living things do. Vines need not bother with perceiving or knowing. Cameras do a different amazing thing: they represent states of affairs that reflect visible light. They produce images that can be relatively accurate depictions of some kinds of things, albeit on a two-dimensional plane. But while cameras need batteries, they cannot go out and buy them. They don't get hungry or wait impatiently for them to show up. They aren't alive.

Like many other animals, we have to do both. We recognize situations and evaluate some of them. Hence we can act, which cameras and vines cannot. Actions have to be based, on the one hand, on perceiving and cognizing the state of our environment, and on the other, on feeling the

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state of our bodies and being motivated to do something. As Aristotle said, we are animals, which means capable of desires, perceptions, and actions.

But special animals. We argue about which beliefs are true. We disagree, a lot, but we all want to believe that what we believe is true, not just that it feels good to believe it. We get ashamed and suffer for acting badly, are angry and depressed that others treat us poorly. We want our dancing at the ceremony to be right, our arrangement of plants in the window to be beautiful. We don't just want to bag the biggest boar so we can eat a lot; we want everyone to see it, and then give the extra away—whether out of kindness or to achieve status, it doesn't much matter. We don't just want to live or exist, but to live *well*, something else Aristotle said.

Just what is "living well"? That question is pursued by a family of subfields of philosophy called the *philosophy of value*. This usually includes ethics, which studies what is morally right or wrong action, aesthetics, concerning what is beautiful or aesthetically compelling, and political philosophy or political theory, which is about what kind of society and government we ought to have. What follows is a book in the philosophy of value, so it will eventually get around to questions of ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. But it will take a while to get there.

It has to. Part of the motivation of this book is a belief that the mainstream of modern Western intellectual culture has pursued a set of conceptual habits that blocks any plausible advance in our philosophical understanding of values. And because a layer or dimension of Western culture has spread all over the world, there is more than enough blockage to go around. I don't mean the modern West was all wrong, or the world is doomed, or that a different set of ideas could "save" either one. The current project merely desires to loosen up a traffic jam, a jam caused partly by smart people thinking there are only two roads to where they want to go. This means that where the two roads cross we find a massive and frozen collection of honking horns and exasperated drivers. The point of this book is that there are more roads to take.

Part of the reason modernity makes it very hard rationally to think about moral values, political values, aesthetic values, and even cognitive values like truth, is the famous *fact-value dichotomy*. Its source has to do with modern science and even modern society. But philosophy, which is the most general form of inquiry in human cultures, has absorbed and to some extent exacerbated the scientific and social problems. Some of the most important philosophical work of the last century, in very different and opposed schools of thought, denied that values can be anything but human

"projections" and held that no rational decisions about values are possible. The most extreme of these—such as existentialism and logical positivism, prominent just before and after the Second World War—have been replaced in recent decades by more subtle analyses. Recent ethics, aesthetics, and political theory remain important, fecund areas of philosophical work. But they tend to deal with the problem of value by becoming highly specialized or merely critical: specialized by proposing which normative principles or rules in a particular field of values survive which counter-examples; and merely critical in showing that the more fundamental attempts to justify all moral or political or aesthetic judgments by the deepest or broadest principles, or "foundations," cannot work. Much more rare is the attempt to think about the nature of the major kinds of values or norms *together*.

One of the most promising developments of recent decades has been a new naturalism in the treatment of ethics, largely inspired by evolutionary psychology. Whereas it was common for a long time to think humans are naturally selfish, and therefore morality couldn't possibly be accounted for in evolutionary or naturalistic terms, there are today numerous scientists and philosophers who argue that humans are naturally *pro-social*, meaning that our ethical judgments and practices evolved under natural selection. That is part of what made us more capable of collaboration with non-kin than any other species on Earth.

But there are problems with this. For some of its philosophical critics, the attempt fails right off the bat. For them, showing that humans are often caused to behave a certain way has nothing to do with showing that this is the *right* way, that the forms of human socialization are the morally right way to act. Evolutionary psychology, like naturalism in general, leaves us a "descriptive" account of what humans tend to do, not a "normative" account of what they should do. After all, if ethics means doing whatever works, or following whatever rules or norms bring success in a given society and historical period, then whatever form of life dominates a given society or period dictates what is right. The notion that I should do whatever "works" could lead to a pretty lousy ethics.

But even the new naturalists themselves recognize another problem. If humans evolved to be highly social, to cooperate and collaborate with non-kin to hunt and gather, that also means they evolved to be *tribal*, to distrust outsiders, members of other societies, even to fight them. If normative ethics is going to live with naturalism, it must die with it too—that is, it must recognize when it is "natural" for us to do awful, nasty, immoral things to members of other tribes. After all, most modern value theorists

want to believe in a universal, cosmopolitan morality of human rights and equality, with a concern for social justice, applying not just to "us" but to "them," the others. But that doesn't seem to be the kind of morality that evolutionary psychology would be able to generate.

Naturalistic, evolutionary psychology by itself may fail to give a philosophically adequate account of normativity, the difference between "is" and "ought," but it does make a beginning in showing us that cooperation-enabling morality is indeed very likely to be natural. The ethicists who question its philosophical adequacy are also partly right, but they fail to consider the causal relations that undergird the human ability and need to be ethical in the first place. At the same time, many thinkers, including scientists, tend to think the human mind is utterly different from everything else in nature. There is a tendency for each relevant discipline and each method within each discipline to regard its own research field as the key to everything while denying that a more generalized metaphysical or systematic approach makes any sense.

My claim will be that naturalism can pass these tests, but only if it is the right kind. Hence this book. I will suggest that a naturalism broadly enough conceived can provide the intellectual background for understanding the main areas of human valuing, and as well the resources for rational normative decision making. But to show this we must do several things at once. To get plausible accounts of the norms of ethics, politics, aesthetics, and their relation to truth, we are going to need a theory of human judgment that includes all of them; to do that we will need a naturalism that accepts that culture, mind, biological processes, and the physical world are all related and potentially causal; and to do that we need an approach to metaphysics that sees each thing as related to others, and no one kind of thing as ultimate or foundational. Finally, we need to see how modern thought altered our understanding of values, for good and ill. This means we have to do some *systematic* philosophy. This need not involve creating a "system" that claims to address or answer everything. But it does require doing several things at once.

Which is no longer a common approach in philosophy. Contemporary philosophy, at least since the Second World War, is quite different from earlier philosophy. In the 1930s, Western philosophy famously split into divergent cultures that eventually, in the postwar period, stopped talking to each other, not just "schools" with different answers to the same questions competing against each other like multiple baseball teams, but traditions who don't ask the same questions or speak the same language. More like a baseball team playing a hockey team playing a volleyball team. Not a lot of fun for spectators.

The dominant culture in the English-speaking world is "analytic" philosophy, rooted in modern logic and philosophy of language, plied by Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and Wittgenstein, among others. Its smaller, loyal opposition is "continental" philosophy, rooted in German and French thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida. Both of these mostly reject traditional, systematic philosophy. The analysts, starting with Russell but doubling down with Wittgenstein and Carnap, rejected metaphysics and foundational approaches to philosophical questions, which they thought were unjustifiable and wrong-headed, a kind of remnant of religion. As time went on, they became extremely specialized into subfields, like much of science, pushing the entire philosophy profession into specializations where nobody wanted to do or even approve of systematic work. The continentals, starting with Nietzsche, then more so with Heidegger, also rejected foundational approaches to philosophical questions, but they developed a different form of specialization in historical literatures or key figures. Following Derrida, Foucault, Rorty, and Butler, some continental philosophers came to regard the aim of philosophy itself as aesthetic or political or both, rather than as inquiry into truth. Thus the two main schools of philosophy—analytic and continental—mostly stopped doing traditional systematic philosophy.

These two schools reflected something called "the two cultures." In a 1959 lecture, C. P. Snow, an English novelist trained in chemistry, argued that Western intellectual life was becoming badly separated into scientists and humanists who could no longer talk to teach other. The analytic-continental divide in philosophy very accurately mirrored this division. Analytic philosophers agree they are inquiring into truth, but mostly think of their work like science, as responses to recent candidate solutions to narrow problems in a subfield, highly suspicious of more speculative and older work. Most continental philosophers engaged in the interpretation of particular philosophical writers and historical periods, like other humanities professors. They read a lot of history but deny the traditional goal of describing and explaining reality in general. All are philosophers, but one modeled on the sciences, the other on the humanities.

Now, every form of human endeavor that seeks to progress in the modern age has a strong tendency to specialization. That is how the modern thing we call "progress" works. No inquirer can doubt that the best standard work, the state of the art of a research field, is usually established by specialists. The most complete and well-informed account of causality in science will probably be done by analysts; the most complete and well-

informed account of Heidegger's philosophy will be continental. But the glories of specialization carry a couple of dangers that are mostly invisible to the specialist, and are particularly unbecoming for philosophy.

One downside is that a lot of work disappears from consideration. Inquiry in science progresses by dropping candidate solutions. But sometimes we drop more than we should. As philosopher Hilary Putnam wrote, each new generation of philosophers tends to throw everybody else's baby out with the bathwater. A concept that fails to solve today's problem may turn out to be helpful in addressing the problems of tomorrow or in a different area. The cost of specialization is often worth it in the sciences. But in the most general of all forms of inquiry, philosophy, that cost inflates.

Specialization also means each inquiry inhabits a narrow research community with shared presuppositions, a technical language, and its own little canon of stock problems and candidate solutions, represented in journals, which are community organs. In addressing the issue x, specialists create alternative analyses and candidate solutions x', x'', x''', et cetera. But the research community's conception of its own subject matter must rest on a distinction from other subject matters. The student exclusively concerned with x or even x' versus x'' must have some background conception of what makes x, x. That presumes a notion of not-x, hence some knowledge of a, p, q, or r—not knowledge of *all* other things, but of *some*. For what if the specialist's conception of *not-x*, on which x rests, is faulty? The specialist can never learn that. Since it is not their job, they cannot find out. We don't need to know much about snails to be an expert on dogs. But what if we ask, "What makes dogs, your specialty, different from all other animals?" To be right about this requires knowing something about a lot of other animals. What if such general questions happen to be key to the next advance in knowledge of animals, including dogs? It might turn out that advancing our understanding of x presumes answers to other issues like *p or q*.

The social realities of academia exacerbate this. The top philosophy programs, where they make new PhDs, are excellent. But they cannot afford to waste faculty lines on forms of thought not generally regarded as intellectually competitive right now. The most successful practitioners must be most concerned with the fashions of, if not the day, then at least the decade. If you are hot, you want to stay that way; if you want to become hot, you'd better get busy. This applies even to the study of the history of philosophy, where some current interpretations are hot, others not. Such programs cannot waste precious faculty lines on philosophers who study yawn-producing ideas of yesterday. Top graduate students do not want to

yawn. Few faculty in such programs—at least, until late in their tenured careers—spend time reading what is outside their specializations. Indeed, the task of assiduously making yourself an expert virtually requires that you *un-learn* any other way of thinking or talking. Schools lower down the success ladder can and do represent the "non-hot," not by design but because they don't have the resources to do otherwise. Lacunae of forgotten theories persist in those shallows. Every now and then they might be right about something that matters.

The opposite of specialized philosophy is systematic philosophy. Whatever else it is, philosophy is the most general or comprehensive form of inquiry. I am not saying philosophy is only inquiry: some think it is also the search for wisdom, or the fulfillment of thinking, or conceptual clarification, or construction of novel modes of experience. But whatever else it is, philosophy contains within itself the most general, unrestricted mode of inquiry. Systematic philosophy is the attempt philosophically to coordinate inquiries into different subject matters. It is based in a gamble that some areas of philosophic inquiry can only be advanced if we relate their investigation to other areas, that getting a better account of mind or agency might require a better account of the physical, or a better understanding of politics might require a better understanding of aesthetics or evolutionary theory, et cetera. It may be that the undergrowth blocking several different lines of inquiry can only be removed all at once because it is entangled.

But this is not a competition. Systematizers must always stand on the shoulders of specialists. And systematic philosophy, contrary to its reputation, must be approached in a fallibilist spirit. The broader you go, the more fallibilist you had better be. As Donald Campbell quipped, we must be willing to be "incompetent in many fields at once." The systematizer, in considering her complex journey, must recognize that every province she traverses can be expanded into endless complexity, some of which may be dispositive for the journey as a whole. The investigators of those provinces have the right to, indeed ought to, complain about the systematizer's quick passage through their domain. The systematizer remains permanently responsible to all their objections. So she cannot fly over the traffic jam, nor speed around it. She must take the long walk through.

Few recent philosophers brave this muddle, where there is lots of stuff but little structure, where "foundations" are shallow and porous, and no formulation can be taken for granted.[2] Charles Peirce, the inventor of pragmatism, fired in 1884 at age forty-five from the only regular teaching position he would ever hold, was neglected for seventy years after his death

in 1914. At one point he lamented, "Only once . . . in all my lifetime have I ever experienced the pleasure of praise. . . . and the praise . . . was meant for blame. It was that a critic said of me that I did seem to be *absolutely sure of my own conclusions*. Never, if I can help it, shall that critic's eye ever rest on what I am now writing; for I owe a great pleasure to him . . ."[3] Fallibilist, interdisciplinary systematizers are not engineering a sturdy building of knowledge, a set of floors anchored to a foundation. They are more like nomads traveling the steppe, in need of a tent, a structure that is stable but pliable and moveable, fixed to reality at a finite number of key points.

So what are we going to use to stake the corners of our tent? First, we will need the most pluralistic philosophical approach to reality we can find. There is such a view. Developed in American philosophy in the mid–twentieth century by philosophers associated with American pragmatism, it is called *objective relativism*. It was created around the time of the First World War, named a bit later, and endorsed by a school of philosophy at Columbia University called "Columbia Naturalism." Why this matters can only be seen later, but it will mean that a host of philosophical habits that obscure the inquiry into values can be jettisoned. We will be using the Columbians' ideas, but with some differences. For example, they thought objective relativism was a kind of naturalism. They were wrong. But that turns out to be an advantage.

Second, we need a naturalism that accepts the idea of *emergence*. The concept of emergence was invented at the start of the twentieth century, mostly by philosopher-ethologists, before psychology had totally separated from philosophy. It disappeared for fifty years but has received a lot of attention in recent decades. We are going to formulate a concept of emergence that can be used to understand nature in general. There is nothing mystical about it; it is simply the notion that natural systems can exhibit properties that cannot be reduced to the properties of their components, and that those exhibited properties can play a causal role, can *do* something. A system can have some properties that are fully reducible and other properties that are not. The result is, when applied broadly, a hierarchical view of nature, in which some kinds of natural phenomena are asymmetrically dependent on, but not reducible to, others, for example, culture on minded, linguistic animals, mind on neurology, life on chemical processes, and chemical materials on mass-energy distributed in time and space. This was the subject of an earlier book of mine (Cahoone 2013a). We are now using it to talk about values.

A third requirement is a *multifunctional theory of human judgment*. The point of this theory is to regard our assertions about what is true or false, our actions, and our artworks all as judgments. All are selective responses to the world, embody a perspective and take a position, and can be valid and rational, but in different ways. The point of this approach is to allow us to think about our so-called "cognitive" judgments or assertions or propositions, our considered actions and choices of what to do, and our arrangements of things that express some quality—in short, our sayings, actions, and makings—as falling under one category. This doesn't mean merging them but relocating what distinguishes them.

Fourth and last, we need to recognize that *modernity has changed the relations among human values*. My point is not just that the modern world is different, that we now have different values than more traditional peoples. Everybody agrees on that. It is that the relations among truth, beauty, moral goodness, and political rightness have changed. Sometimes philosophers discussing ethics or aesthetics or politics write on modern theories and modern situations as if their conclusions ought to hold universally for all humans at all times. Others write on older, medieval or ancient views of value as if those could apply directly to the modern world. But modern society is very different from all prior human societies. Not totally, but very. Our account of what is true, right, just, and beautiful has to apply to human societies in general and yet inform our judgments of our extremely novel, modern way of life. We can still judge modern equality and human rights and democracy superior, but we can't do it by simply defining all ethics and politics in modern terms.

Where can we find these particular tent stakes? They come from roughly the first half of the twentieth century, from 1900 to the 1950s. There is a reason for this. The period from 1900 to 1930 was a time when what would be called analytic and continental philosophy were not yet separate disciplines, and both regarded American pragmatism as an interlocutor. In that period we find philosophers who are just as "modern" as we are—who presume Darwinian evolution, modern logic, physical relativity and quantum theory, early abstract art, industrial mass society—yet before Western philosophy split into the two cultures of scientific or analytic philosophers and the humanistic or continental philosophers, which corresponded to the general abandonment of systematic philosophy. In the 1920s, philosophers as different as Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Husserl, Heidegger, Dewey, C. I. Lewis, Whitehead, Bergson, and Husserl were all part of one conversation.

Second, during that time through the 1950s there occurred an intermixing of scientific fields, such as ethology, the study of animal behavior, with both analytic and continental philosophy, including figures like Lloyd Morgan, Conrad Waddington, Jacob von Uexküll, Heinz Werner, Kurt Goldstein, Konrad Lorenz, and Merleau-Ponty. Third and last, immediately after the Second World War, the successors to logical positivism, the "ordinary language" philosophers, G. E. Anscombe, R. M. Hare, Bernard Williams, and Alasdair MacIntyre, brought a new approach to ethics, rationality, and human agency that was intertwined with anthropology. In all these periods there was strong interaction between American pragmatism and analytic philosophy, before all three schools finally went to their opposite corners. And it so happens that a specific form of naturalism, at home at Columbia University from 1930 to 1955 combined pragmatism and analytic philosophy to make made major contributions to logic, the theory knowledge, metaphysics, and, oddly, the philosophy of art. We will see their unique view.

The three chapters of part I will sketch our approach to nature, setting the stage for the rest of the book: stating the fact-value problem (chapter 1), explaining objective relativism (chapter 2), and presenting our emergent naturalism (chapter 3). Part II will describe how biology (chapter 4), animal psychology (chapter 5), and human agency (chapter 6) display values; how this defeats the "naturalistic fallacy" (chapter 7); and how human value judgments (chapter 8) are altered by modernity (chapter 9). In part III, I will propose a way of understanding moral norms (chapters 10 and 12), truth as the norm of inquiry (chapter 11), the norms of political activity (chapter 13) and art (chapter 14), and finally "The Good" (chapter 15). In none of these chapters do I hope to offer the one right or final understanding of the True, the Good, the Just, or the Beautiful. But taken together these chapters do suggest a way of regarding these norms, and their rational consideration, within the naturalism of parts I and II.

If our supplies and bedroll are handy, let's grab our compass and begin.