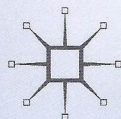


# The Ethics of Creativity

Edited by  
Seana Moran,  
David Cropley and  
James C. Kaufman



# 2

## Moral Craftsmanship

Mark Coeckelbergh

University of Twente, The Netherlands

Not all art is morally acceptable. For example, most people would agree that it is wrong to torture a person for the sake of an *art performance* or to kill a person for *aesthetic* reasons. More generally, if something qualifies as “beautiful,” that does not necessarily make it *right* or *good*. At the same time, the boundary between ethics and aesthetics may not be as clear as many people think. Can morality be strictly separated from aesthetics? Perhaps ethics itself already has an “aesthetic” dimension. One of the questions in this volume concerns how people can be creative *in* morality and how they can change the ethics of their lives, practices, and societies. Can morality itself be creative? What does it mean to be “morally creative”?

In this chapter, I briefly explore what moral creativity could mean by developing the notion of “moral craftsmanship.” What does “craftsmanship” mean in the moral domain? What kind of creativity is it? What kind of learning does it involve? What might be an example of moral craftsmanship? And what can be gained by using this notion?

I start with the notion of craftsmanship and analyze the kind of knowledge, creativity, imagination, and learning it requires. In particular, I show that craftsmanship involves the development of know-how and skills, and of openness to and engagement with the world and with others. Then I argue that the moral creativity we need to cope with problems in the real world requires a similar kind of knowledge, creativity, imagination, and learning. I show how this view calls into question Platonic and modern conceptions of moral knowledge, and how it suggests a view of moral change that emphasizes personal and societal growth rather than “moral design.”

## Craftsmanship and learning skills

A craftsperson does not only “do a job” and “get the work done,” but also works on something with great skill, which he or she has attained through training. Furthermore, craftsmanship typically involves physical and bodily engagement with things and tools. This gives the craftsperson a particular kind of knowledge. In *The Craftsman*, Sennett (2008) gives examples of craftsmanship ranging from cooking to medicine and music. He argues that these physical, bodily practices give us tactile experience and relational understanding: a “tacit knowledge” (2008, p. 50). Someone who is a craftsperson knows how, rather than only knows that. Those who have this kind of knowledge do good work and achieve excellence in their work. Achieving excellence is also something that matters to the craftsperson: he or she is committed and motivated to creating something excellent.

The kind of creativity, imagination, and learning involved in this work is not so much about thinking up a concept, which is then applied to the matter at hand, but also and mainly about creating by handling, about improvising, and about learning while doing. For example, a creative cook may read a recipe, but during cooking he or she uses know-how and experience, acquired during years of learning and practice, to create a meal that is so much more than the recipe and that improvises on the recipe in original and unpredictable ways. This kind of cook does not first imagine the meal and then start working to create or recreate that mental image. Excellence in craftsmanship is not the result of a new “concept,” but rather emerges from and in the process of handling. It is a tacit kind of knowledge, since it cannot completely be turned into a recipe. It has developed by means of tactile experience and involvement with food and people. If it is imagination at all, then it is not imagination as the production of a mental image, but rather the very practical creation and improvisation that go on during the crafting.

This does not mean that explicit instruction is obsolete. In the beginning, the apprentice requires explicit instruction. The apprentice cook needs a recipe and instructions for how to use things in the kitchen; the apprentice musician needs a score and instruction in how to play the instrument; and the apprentice medical surgeon needs instruction and theoretical knowledge about the human body.

This is true for all skilled learning. Consider how we learn to ride a bike, how we learn to drive a car, how we learn to fly an airplane. In order to become skilled in anything, we have to start with explicit instruction and some theory. But, as Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) have

argued, in order to become experts, we need to acquire the tacit knowledge, the know-how, the knowledge-in-practice to become crafty at it. Moreover, acquiring this knowledge is impossible if we take a detached position and attitude. Instead, we need to handle the material and take up the tools (for example, get on the bike), immerse ourselves in the activity, persist in it and continue to train (also when, for example, we fall off the bike), and have the commitment to try to get better at it.

The craftsperson, then, is a skilled expert of the "highest" kind: he or she is not only competent, but also creative. The craftsperson has a kind of knowledge that enables him or her to cook, make music, perform surgery, and so on, in a way that, in a sense, no one else does and can do. The knowledge of the craftsperson has a "personal" dimension, since his or her particular creativity is linked to his or her particular way of engaging with things and people. There are usually many more craftspeople who are in the same craft or trade (for example, making a particular type of music, doing a specific category of surgery)—that is, *what* they all do is the same—but exactly what each of them does can never be reduced to this type or category. They are seen as reinventing it, each in their own way, as going beyond it, as creating their own category, since *how* they do it is unique. Their know-how is partly shared with others and partly unique. What they do is more imaginative or creative than others, but not because they are in possession of a concept, map, recipe, or code that potentially could easily be shared but that they keep to themselves for some reason. Their creativity comes from having acquired a particular kind of know-how. Such know-how can only partially be transmitted and can only be shared by means of a personal learning relation, by means of apprenticeship. However, the goal of the apprentice is not to copy the master; imitation is part of the learning, but only in the beginning. The goal is to attain his or her own *personal* craftsmanship that grows by means of a specific, personal training trajectory and within a learning relation with the master craftsperson.

Indeed, not only the learning but the whole practice of craftsmanship is a deeply social activity, as it was in medieval times and also today. Consider people working together in a car repair workshop: the craftspeople collaborate and there are relations of companionship between them. The learning that takes place is also social learning: they share knowledge and each develops expertise in relation to the others. Much of the know-how is shared by the whole, by the workshop. Again, this means that the creativity of craftsmanship involves a unique kind of knowledge that could only develop in *this* workshop in collaboration

with *these* people. The garage workshop, the intensive care unit in a hospital, the kitchen of a restaurant, and so on are all places of craftsmanship, where people are gathered around tools and with other people to learn, to become more skilled, and to develop a creativity unique to the place and the team in which they work.

The result of the expert craftsman's creative work, then, can be called excellent in at least the following senses. First, the product of the work is excellent, since it is the result of the highest creativity and expertise, based on long training in particular social and physical settings, related to particular people and tools. Second, the craftsman also achieves personal excellence: he or she has become a good craftsman. In both senses, the excellence achieved by the craftsman rests on the "how," on the way toward excellence, the route that makes something excellent.

### Moral craftsmanship

If this is an adequate description of craftsmanship, in particular the *creativity* and learning of craftsmanship, what could we learn from it for morality? What would craftsmanship mean in the moral domain? What is moral know-how, and what role does—and should—it play in morality? In what sense does moral learning consist in the learning of skills, personal learning, and social learning? What kind of excellence is produced?

In order to articulate the notion of moral craftsmanship, let me make a distinction between two conceptions of moral creativity, which are connected to two conceptions of moral imagination. One is Platonic and modern; the other is influenced by pragmatism, phenomenology, and Aristotelian thinking.

### Moral creativity as conceptual design

A typical response to ethical problems—problems we have now or problems we expect in the future—is to call for rules and principles, a new moral code that should help to guide and regulate ethical conduct. This approach is often used by moral philosophers, many of whom are fond of moral principles and theories, but it is also typical of the way society and politics respond to problems. If there are problems in global finance, we call for ethical codes and more regulation. If there are problems in prostitution, we want new laws. And if we think about ethical problems with future autonomous robots, we try to make ethical laws for those robots: for instance, the laws proposed in Asimov's (1942) science

fiction stories and in contemporary robot ethics that reflect on how to make them into "moral machines" (Wallach & Allen, 2009).

If we adopt this approach to morality, we assume the modern view that *humans* have to be made into moral machines whose moral subjectivity, if they have any at all, is limited to making or following laws. Society can only become more ethical if people follow moral rules. The rule-giver or law-giver is a perfectly rational agent who knows what is reasonable, and we have the choice either to become such a perfectly rational agent who is able to deliberate autonomously about what is right or—if we cannot—to follow the super-agent's rules.

The model that fits this moral epistemology is theoretical science (if a "pure" theoretical science exists at all), the practice of law-making, and perhaps also classical artificial intelligence. We philosophers, and perhaps all citizens who use their capacity of reasoning, conceive of rules in our study room and rationally think about which laws should govern society. For example, deontological philosophers propose moral and political rights and laws that should protect individuals. Utilitarian philosophers start from a concept and a calculus, and then try to (re)design society. Bentham (1970[1789]) proposed a calculus to determine which act would bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of individuals. In the twentieth century, Peter Singer (1975) proposed a utilitarian principle that is supposed to solve issues in animal ethics. At work is the philosopher as reasoner and as moral scientist who tries to figure out which moral principles or moral laws should apply.

Moral philosophers working in this tradition seek to change society from top down. In this respect, they do not differ from Plato, who envisioned the ideal of the philosopher-king designing the perfect, well-ordered society. Of course, their model is not science as we know it today. Plato did not take to experimental science as a method to gain knowledge. Instead, he held that gaining moral knowledge was a matter of *theoria*, which might be translated as "insight" or "vision." Yet, there is a sense in which both the Platonic and the modern way of understanding morality share the same approach to moral creativity: they think that such creativity is about *theoria*, about imagining and creating a blueprint of the human as moral (since perfectly rational) and as good, of the just society. The philosopher designs a concept of the right (modern ethics) or a concept of the good (ancient ethics). This requires a kind of imagination, but it is a detached mode of knowing, knowing and reasoning that go on "in my head." The philosopher contemplates the good, or reasons about the right, while looking at the world from a distance. It is what Nagel called a "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986).

Furthermore, this view presupposes that there is a fixed good, that once we have theory about the good, we only need to “apply” it to the messy, practical world.

But is this kind of moral knowledge necessary and sufficient for morality? Is this kind of creativity and imagination sufficient for improving the moral quality of persons and of society? For example, is rational thinking enough to cope with technological risk, or do we also need emotions? And is “study-room” imagination enough to cope with the moral challenges we face as individuals and societies? For example, can principles alone help us to cope with complex and pressing global problems such as energy and water shortages, climate change and environmental degradation, financial and economic crisis, and military conflict? According to Popper, Plato’s “wise men” are too occupied with the problems of the superior world; they hold fast to “the ordered and the measured” and have no time to “look down at the affairs of men” (Popper, 2013[1945], p. 138). Moral creativity, it seems, not only requires detached science and metaphysics, it also has something to do with emotions and intuitions, and there seems to be something problematic about thinking up moral rules and a moral order while residing in the proverbial ivory tower without engaging with practical problems.

Inspired by the Humean and pragmatist response to Kantian and utilitarian philosophy, one could try to combine principles and imagination by acknowledging that a different kind of imagination and emotions plays a role in moral reasoning. For example, one might think about the consequences of following a rule. One might project oneself into a particular situation. One could also use empathy, and ask what it would be like to be *that* particular person in *that* situation. Indeed, some positions in the literature on moral imagination (for example, Johnson, 1993; Coeckelbergh, 2007) accept that morality is basically about principles, but argue that it has an imaginative dimension. They try to combine the view that morality is basically a form of moral reasoning with the idea that imagination, emotions, intuition, and so on play an important role *in* that reasoning. This view is not wrong, but we also need to ask the question of whether morality is *more* than moral reasoning and *more* than thinking about principles. We need to move on to a more radical view of moral creativity, which rejects the basic assumptions of the Platonic and modern view. Such a view could run as follows: Morality is not all about reasoning, and not even all about imagination as a mental capacity or mental operation that acts as a kind of tool or plug-in for moral reasoning. Moral creativity and moral imagination must be understood in a more practical and social way, one that is part of a much

more "fluid" view of morality. Let me now start to unpack and develop this intuition.

Perhaps we use our imagination when we consider the moral consequences of our actions or when we engage in moral reasoning by using emotions and empathy, as Humeans think we do. But in both cases, it is an imagination *within* reasoning: as moral reasoners and deliberators, we imagine the consequences of having particular rules, imagine how it would be to be that other person, and so on. This kind of creativity and imagination still goes on "in my head"; it has its origin in the Cartesian subject that is disconnected from the world. It is still about seeing the good from a distance. The view that morality is more a matter of empathy and of feeling, perception, intuition, and moral vision was and is a welcome response to the rationalistic tendencies in modern thinking. However, emphasizing emotions, empathy, and intuition remains a modern response if and insofar as it presupposes a non-relational moral subject, one who is not engaged with the world, contemplating morality in the Cartesian cocoon of his or her mind. In order to avoid concepts such as imagination or intuition being recuperated by the study-room model of moral thinking, they should be given a new role within a relational, non-Platonic, non-Cartesian, and non-Kantian view of morality and of knowledge. According to this view, acquiring moral knowledge is not only about achieving *know-that* (values, principles, rules), not about having a theoretical "intuition" or "vision" separated from the world, and not even only about imagining the consequences of one's actions and putting oneself in the other's shoes. Instead, it is about real-world *know-how*, feeling one's way through the world, about grasping, about handling, and about touching. For instance, when dealing with the current economic and financial crisis, we do not have the luxury to start from a blank slate. We are already in trouble, and we need to find creative solutions that start from the messy world in which we find ourselves and from the concrete problems we face—as individuals, but also as societies and as people who are called on to respond to others. The kind of moral creativity needed here is of a more *practical* kind.

In the next section, I will articulate a different conception of moral creativity and moral imagination by using instead models and metaphors from non-conceptual art, music, dance, cooking, gardening, and creative manual work. Inspired by Dewey's pragmatism (in particular Fesmire's interpretation of Dewey), Heideggerian phenomenology (for instance Dreyfus and Borgmann), Aristotelian thinking (MacIntyre), and accounts of craftsmanship (Sennett, Crawford), I will articulate the notion of "moral craftsmanship." This will imply a conception of



morality that replaces the detached rational moral subject of modern philosophy by the involved subject, engaged in the world. The exercise of *that* kind of imagination neither relies on ivory-tower moral science nor Cartesian-style empathy, but rather emphasizes moral dancing, moral improvisation, moral engineering, and moral tinkering. Moreover, all these kinds of moral doings and moral know-how crucially involve others. We cannot fix moral problems alone and we have to stay in tune with others. I argue that the moral creativity and moral imagination we need are *both more practical and more social*. I suggest that a truly creative and imaginative ethics is not about sitting down and creating laws, mental images, theoretical visions, individual artistic "genius," or "concepts," which then have to be applied to the "real world" and provide guidelines for "ordinary" people. Rather, a truly creative and imaginative ethics involves the development and use of moral skill in order to cope with the moral problems in which all of us are involved, which requires a basic openness to, and engagement with, the world, as well as an openness to and engagement with *others*, on which our life and the solution to our moral problems depend.

### Moral creativity as moral craftsmanship

A good starting place for articulating this alternative approach to moral creativity is Dewey's ethics. According to Dewey, ethics is not centrally about theory, but about solving practical problems. Let us begin with his moral epistemology in order to achieve some distance from the modern and Platonic approach.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey distinguishes between knowing how and know that, and argues that we "*know how* by means of our habits" (Dewey, 1922, p. 177; Dewey's emphasis). If we have the latter kind of knowledge, our knowledge is not theoretical or reasoned but a matter of practical skill and habit. The knowledge we need for ethics, then, is more about knowing how than knowing that: it is about knowing how to live a good life by developing practical skill and good habits. Habits are not "mental" as opposed to "non-mental," they involve skills, and skills are embodied, physical, and material. Dewey writes: "We should laugh at any one who said that he was master of stone working, but that the art was cooped up within himself and in no wise dependent upon support from objects and assistance from tools" (Dewey, 1922, p. 15).

Similarly, we should laugh at anyone who suggests that acquiring moral mastery is in no way bodily or material. As relational beings and

as embodied moral subjects, we are already standing in relation to things and to others. Morality is not merely conceptual but arises out of "active connections of human beings with one another" (Dewey, 1922, p. 225); these connections are also related to our bodies and to matter. Let me further unpack this view of moral knowledge.

Heidegger also objected to modern Cartesian dualism. We are not reasoning egos separated from the world; we are always already engaged in the world. He used the term "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1996[1927]) to denote this involved character of human existence. For moral knowledge, this view implies that we cannot achieve complete, sufficient moral knowledge as detached reasoners or as detached feelers. Both the rationalist view (for example, Kantian or utilitarian) and the Humean view presuppose that we are first detached, Cartesian moral subjects who then reason about moral problems and try to bridge the distance between ourselves and the world, and between ourselves and others. However, this modern idea of detached moral reasoning denies that we are beings-in-the-world, that our moral subjectivity is already relational from the start. Moreover, even if there were such a thing as detached reasoning, the phenomenology of moral experience shows that what we take to be explicit theoretical deliberation is an exceptional state. According to Dewey, the need for moral reflection only arises in terms of crisis, when habits no longer work (see also Pappas, 2008, p. 122). Normally morality is not a matter of detached reasoning but moral development-in-action. In particular, it is a matter of the development of skill. Let me say more about this developmental aspect of skill by using Dreyfus.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) argue that moral knowledge should be conceptualized in terms of skill. We are always already embodied and engaged in practices when we encounter a moral problem. Acquiring moral knowledge is a matter of building practical know-how. If we want to become morally mature, we need to learn from experience and use that know-how "so as to respond more appropriately to the demands of others in the concrete situation" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1991, p. 247). If this requires intuition, it is intuition that is cured by experience and developed through experience. It is not a mental, theoretical exercise but a worldly, practical exercise. We could add that it better resembles how manual workers acquire knowledge than the learning of students who study textbooks and arguments. The latter kind of knowledge may be part of what needs to be done, but it is not sufficient for becoming a moral "expert" or for exercising moral creativity. Moral creativity, then, is something that needs to grow in experience. It is practical imagination

that develops as one copes with problems. It is about skill, and skill requires training.

This means that moral problems cannot be solved once and for all by using moral principles. Rather, we have to learn moral creativity and grow in its use—without any guarantee that next time we can use the same solution. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) propose an experimental and developmental view of ethics: ethical expertise requires skills and know-how as opposed to rules and propositional knowledge (know-that). Again, this does not mean that rules are superfluous; they are a good start. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980, 1991) make a distinction between different stages of moral knowledge, ranging from “novice” to “expert.” Formalization and propositional knowledge are useful for novices, but moral maturity means that one has acquired an expertise that has grown in practice (see also Coeckelbergh, 2011). Moral experts are much more “creative” and “imaginative” in the sense that they no longer need rules or (other) explicit instruction. Their moral creativity and imagination have grown through trial and error and their knowledge is what Polanyi called “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1967). Compare the acquisition of moral knowledge with learning to ride a bike or drive a car: first we need explicit instruction and rules, but someone who is an expert in this no longer needs the rules and can improvise, can be creative.

Furthermore, if moral creativity requires “a handling, using, and taking care of things which has its own kind of knowledge” (Crawford, 2009, p. 69; Crawford refers to Heidegger here), then this is not only good for others, but also contributes to our own virtue. For example, skilled work cultivates the virtue of “attentiveness” (Crawford, 2009, p. 82) and renders us involved “in a personal way”: we care (Crawford, 2009, p. 95). Moral creativity could also be considered a virtue: it is the fruit of the development of moral skill. It is imagination: not the imagination of the detached Cartesian genius, but imagination-at-work. If this involves deliberation at all, it “is not disembodied cerebration deciding which action is derivable from ultimate principles, but is a form of engaged inquiry touched off by an uncertain situation” (Fesmire, 2003, p. 28). And insofar as it requires skill, it is more than “inquiry,” a term that may still suggest a “mental” kind of imagination, unconnected to the social and material.

The previous analysis of moral creativity can be summarized by saying that moral creativity is a form of craftsmanship. It involves physical and bodily engagement with things; these physical, bodily practices give us tactile experience and relational understanding, a “tacit knowledge”

of morality; and this produces virtue (*arete*). Thus, if moral creativity is a matter of craftsmanship, then the morally creative person is creative and imaginative in the way a cook is creative. A cook's knowledge is not merely theoretical and conceptual: his or her knowledge is tacit, has developed by means of tactile experience and involvement with food and people. Similarly, a moral "chef" is wise and creative: he or she has not the wisdom and imagination of Plato's statesman, but the wisdom and imagination of the moral cook, who has practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and exercises practical creativity and practical imagination. This enables him or her to respond adequately to the situation, the people, and the problem at hand.

The term *phronesis* is borrowed from Aristotle (2000), who uses it in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to him, practical wisdom is about perceiving what is good in concrete situations (Aristotle, 2000, 1142a) and about realizing a good that can only be realized, as Carr puts it, "in and through praxis itself" (Carr, 2006, p. 426). This form of knowledge can only be acquired in practice; one needs experience. Aristotle writes that "moral excellence comes about as a result of habit" (1103a) and that "the man who is to be good must be well trained and habituated" (1180a 14–15). He also gives an important role to law, deliberation, and reasoning (in this respect he is a forerunner of the modern moral philosopher), but his concept of practical wisdom has inspired many contemporary thinkers who are today categorized as "virtue ethicists." For example, MacIntyre has written that practical knowledge concerns "the capacity to judge and to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way" (MacIntyre, 2007[1981], p. 150). This means that good is not pre-given; rather, it develops within a practice. Good craftsmanship seems to be good practice, with practice involving internal goods, goods internal to the practice. MacIntyre writes in *After Virtue*:

By a "practice" I... mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to practices are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (2007[1981], p. 187)

Similarly, we could say that moral creativity is achieved in the course of trying to be an excellent person, that it is not something that can

be judged by external standards—ethical rules, laws, principles—but that it is part of moral expertise and moral craftsmanship, which no longer needs rules and explicit instruction and which is the result of a (long) process of moral development through engagement with people and with things. It involves not conceptual imagination, not the imagination of the (conceptual) designer, but practical imagination.

This kind of imagination is not only practical, but also *social*. In order to explain this we can again rely on Dewey's pragmatism, which understands morality as a social and imaginative enterprise. Again, we must question the modern-Romantic model of the hyper-individualistic genius, who acts as a single source of imagination and imprints his or her concept on the world. Instead, the social dimension of moral creativity compares well to the social dimension of drama and music. The moral life is not a solo music recital or a solo dance performance. Together we try to shape society and to cope with moral challenges. For example, coping with the current environmental problems cannot be done by an individual genius with a great concept or theory (for example, a scientist, artist, philosopher, politician), but requires pooled intelligence and action from all of us, with many people trying out different things.

This idea is in tune with Dewey's conception of moral deliberation as dramatic rehearsal. Fesmire uses the metaphor of jazz improvisation: when we play in a group of musicians we always respond to what others do (Fesmire, 2003) and indeed to what others have done in the past. There is a tradition:

A jazz musician...takes up the attitude of others by catching a cadence from the group's signals while anticipating the group's response to her own signals. Drawing on the resources of tradition, memory, and long exercise, she plays into the past tone to discover the possibilities for future tones. (Fesmire, 2003, p. 94)

We could also say that in dance the dancers respond to, and anticipate, what others do, and that the choreographer and the dancers do not create *ex nihilo* but dance into past movements to discover possibilities for future movements. Similarly, in morality we do not start from a blueprint, but from the habits and institutions that are handed over to us from the past. As in the arts, there is no creation *ex nihilo*. Even the painter starting from a blank canvas does not begin from nothing, but works within his or her connections with people and things, within his or her habits, within the tracks of personal history and societal history.

This is also an important dimension of the moral life and of moral creativity.

Moreover, since Aristotle, virtue is also understood to have an important social dimension: one can only develop into a virtuous person within a community. As Sennett emphasizes, the workshop of the craftsperson is a social space (2008, p. 73). The skilled work going in the workshop is also a form of working together and contributes to community building and to the growth of solidarity. Sennett writes that the medieval guild forged a strong sense of community, that it had rituals, and that its fraternities helped workers in need (2008, p. 60). Similarly, the moral craftsperson is not a solitary "moral worker" but always works with others. Moral improvement is a collaborative project, and in order to exercise moral creativity one has to work together with others. The moral imagination at work here is at the same time a social imagination.

Borgmann (1984) has also pointed to the social benefits of skilled work: skilled work is "bound up with social engagement" (1984, p. 42). He gives the example of what he calls "focal practices" such as gathering around a stove or drinking wine together. If there is an imagination that corresponds to skilled work, it is not the coining of an abstract concept but a very practical, embodied, and social activity. Similarly, the exercise of moral imagination is something people do together and cannot and should not be left to individuals in their study room. Moral imagination is needed where the moral challenges are: among people doing things together and gathering around the problems they face and in which they are involved. For example, we cannot detach ourselves from global problems: we all face them, in some way or other, and they can draw us together and demand a collaborative response from us.

This view of moral creativity also suggests a different, non-Platonic, and perhaps even non-modern view of how to change society: instead of making a blueprint of society and imagining the "perfect" society, the creativity we need here is one that imagines a society "on the move," a changing society as we find it, and a society of which we are *part* and in which we *participate*. It is not a society from which we are detached as philosopher-kings; we imagine better ways of doing things and of doing things together as part of a living society with its ongoing social and moral experiments.

But if society and morality are moving, this means we can no longer rely on fixed principles. As Dewey writes in *Human Nature and Conduct*, "life is a moving affair in which old moral truth ceases to apply" (1922, p. 164). Principles are part of our *toolkit*, but they are not more than that: they are not part of a transcendent collection of external truths,

truths that have nothing to do with our social practices. Instead, as I said when discussing the neo-Aristotelian view of virtue, good is internal to our practices. According to the Deweyan pragmatist view, principles are crystallized forms of moral experience, not the other way around as the Platonic view has it.

Furthermore, the relational view of moral subjectivity and moral creativity also has implications for thinking about the extent to which we can change the morality of our societies and of people. The modern-Romantic “genius” or Platonic model of moral creativity assumes that we can act as moral and social engineers in the sense of designing the concept of a perfect society with perfect people and then implementing this design, applying this concept to reality. But the Heideggerian, pragmatist, and neo-Aristotelian currents in contemporary philosophy suggest that this view of social change fails to acknowledge the existence of a moral tradition and fails to take into account the limits to moral change understood in terms of conceptual art and design.

If moral change depends on the cultural horizon that is already there and on the moral language and the material-technological structures and moral geographies that are already in place (Coeckelbergh, 2012), and if one’s efforts to change morality crucially depend on what others do, then moral change is a slow, incremental process that cannot be completely controlled. In *Growing Moral Relations* (Coeckelbergh, 2012), I inquired into the conditions of possibility of moral change, and found that moral change depends on, and is limited by, our language, social relations, and culture, material and technological structures, moral-geographical patterns, spiritual and religious way of thinking and doing, and so on. Therefore, the metaphor of growth is a better one for describing moral change than, for example, design, production, or implementation. If morality is a relational matter and if moral creativity is deeply relational too, we cannot just change morality or society by having another concept. At most, we can do some gardening—preferably *creative* gardening in the practical and social sense articulated in this chapter.

## Conclusion

I have argued that moral creativity is a matter of know-how and social engagement, not of designing moral principles or a Brave New World. We need imagination, but instead of only imagining an ideal moral world and its principles and rules, or using imagination *in* moral reasoning, we also need a more practical, social, and fluid kind of

imagination, a creativity that is entangled with our experiences and our practices.

This kind of creative morality requires and promotes the moral development of humans rather than moral machines, and avoids a view of morality that confuses moral maturity with an approach to morality that may help moral beginners (children), but that when applied to adults is at best unfruitful and at worst pathological and dangerous. The kind of creativity and imagination we need in morality is not about designing or following rules and principles, but is about acquiring moral skill, attaining what I call “moral craftsmanship.” Moreover, if changing the morality of one’s life, practices, and society is not only a matter of “design,” the metaphor of growth is more appropriate for describing moral change. This means that true moral creativity is about imagining new possibilities by trying out things in practice and by working together to make things better while drawing on the rich resources of moral experience—experience that has grown during our lifetimes and during the lifetimes of those who were struggling with moral and social challenges long before we were born. It is in this dance with contemporary, past, and future others that we have to imagine, discover, and create new moral possibilities.

## References

- Aristotle. (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics* (R. Crisp, trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Asimov, I. (1942). Runaround. *Astounding Science Fiction*, March, 94–103.
- Bentham, J. (1970[1789]). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (J. H. Burns & H. L. A. Hart, eds.). London: Athlone Press.
- Borgmann, A. (1984). *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Carr, W. (2006). Philosophy, methodology and action research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 40(4): 421–435.
- Coeckelbergh, M. (2007). *Imagination and Principles: An Essay on the Role of Imagination in Moral Reasoning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coeckelbergh, M. (2011). Environmental virtue: Motivation, skill, and (in)formation technology. *Environmental Philosophy*, 8(2), 141–169.
- Coeckelbergh, M. (2012). *Growing Moral Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crawford, M. B. (2009). *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. New York: Penguin.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Dreyfus, S. E., & Dreyfus, H. L. (1980). *A Five-Stage Model of the Mental Activities Involved in Direct Skill Acquisition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.



- Dreyfus, H., & Dreyfus, S. (1991). Towards a phenomenology of ethical expertise. *Human Studies*, 14(4), 229–250.
- Fesmire, S. (2003). *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1996[1927]). *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit* (J. Stambaugh trans.) Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Johnson, M. (1993). *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (2007[1981]). *After Virtue*, 3rd edn. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Nagel, T. (1986). *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pappas, G. F. (2008). *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Polanyi, M. (1967). *The Tacit Dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Popper, K. (2013[1945]). *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal Liberation*. New York: Random House.
- Wallach, W., & Allen, C. (2009). *Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.