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Editor's Introduction

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MICHAEL BISHOP

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Philosophers investigate the nature of morality. And scientists study the moral judgments people make, the moral norms people enforce, and the systems of moral rules people embrace. What is the relationship between these investigations? The traditional philosophical view is that an unbreachable wall divides these activities. Philosophy and science investigate entirely separate domains. Philosophy investigates the normative realm—the true nature of morality. Science investigates the descriptive realm—how different people or groups of people think about morality and how they deploy moral norms and rules. Just as it would be absurd to investigate the nature of the heavens by exploring how different people think about the heavens, it would be absurd to investigate the nature of morality by exploring how different people think about morality.

In the past few decades, the empirical study of morality has really blossomed. And philosophers and psychologists have begun to call the traditional view into question. Perhaps it is a mistake to assume there is an intellectual iron curtain between the empirical and philosophical studies of morality. Perhaps each of these endeavors can be informed and enriched by the other.

Some of the most exciting empirical work on morality is to be found in cognitive science and experimental philosophy (much of which might reasonably be considered a branch of cognitive science). Some of this research investigates whether robust character traits are common (or

even whether they exist), how people make moral judgments, how people justify moral judgments, and what sorts of factors tend to be correlated with or bring about happiness and well-being. Many philosophers have challenged the traditional approach by arguing that many of these findings have important implications for the philosophical study of morality. These and other empirical studies (e.g., in biology or anthropology) that are potentially relevant to morality raise two urgent questions: What does the science say about morality? And what implications, if any, do these empirical investigations have for our understanding of morality?

In May of 2011, a very impressive group of philosophers and psychologists convened to address these issues at the 7th International Symposium of Cognition, Logic and Communication held at the Center for Cognitive Sciences and Semantics in Riga, Latvia. The conference was a great success. This was the product of two factors. The first was the culturally rich backdrop provided by Riga and the warm hospitality of our hosts. And for this, I would like to thank the conference organizers: Jurgis Šķilters, Sandra Lapointe, Kristine Ante, Signe Mežinska, Signe Cāne, Jānis Pencis, and Armands Leimanis to mention just a few. Many thanks also to the rector of the University of Latvia, prof. Mārcis Auziņš for his support. The second reason the Riga conference on Morality and Cognitive Science was so memorable was the high quality of the presentations and discussions. This volume includes some of the best and most interesting ideas presented there. My hope is that this volume will contribute in a small way to breaching the wall that has for too long kept science and philosophy apart.