4 Tacitness in Practice Theory
Practices Then and Now

The concept of practice has a long history in the human sciences and in philosophy, albeit under various names. Much of the present interest in the concept, and in what has come to be called "practice theory," is a result of the failure of alternative programs of inquiry to fulfill their initial promises. These failures are related to practice ideas in an important way: Practice theories are a response to the inadequacy of theoretical or discursive summations or reductions of various activities, such as science or moral conduct. The history of modern thought, or modernity, is defined by such projects: logical positivism in the case of science, various ethical theories in the case of morals, rationalist political theory, such as Rawlsianism, and the grand narratives of social theory and history, notably Marxism.

Heidegger was the chronicler and philosopher of these failures as metaphysical doctrines, as Michael Oakeshott was of them as political doctrines, and Alasdair MacIntyre was of the project of ethical theory, which he replaced with his own practice-oriented account of the historical nature of morality. MacIntyre reduced moral doctrines from a philosophical or grounding role to the role of theoretical responses to practical conflicts that arise in moral practice within traditions of activities that are undergoing change as a result of changed social circumstances. In social theory, thinkers on the Left such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault grasped that the traditional Marxist vision of class struggle resulting in subjective readiness for revolution, the false consciousness story, was dead. They turned to practice ideas to account for the subjective experiences in which false consciousness—or what had replaced false consciousness—was reproduced. These ideas were appropriated and developed by feminism to account for the reproduction of sexism and the failure of the modernizing projects of earlier generations, such as the suffragettes, to bring about the transformation of consciousness expected to result from women being allowed to vote.

All of the failed projects were, in part, based on explanations that proved to be inadequate. "Practice theory" was one of the explanations that remained standing after the explanations associated with the various projects were cut down. Yet, like the explanations that failed, "practice" was an explanation with distinctive properties. With "practice," the subject

of practice theory, one reaches something which purports to be fundamental. Practices as usually understood are not fully articulable or capable of being fully described. There is nothing general that is beyond or behind practice that explains it. Thus the kinds of theories of practices one can have are theories that point to features of something elemental, something which cannot be reduced to the kind of object that a theory could reduce to something else or account for by something else. The attraction of practice theory is in part that it is a surrogate for the failed explanations. But it is a surrogate that can be conceived of in a variety of ways, with different properties, and different implications.

"CLASSICAL" PRACTICE THEORIES

In *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994) I identified two large families of concepts, one including notions like frames, worldviews, and paradigms, and the other including *habitus*, embodied knowledge, skills, and mores, among other things. After the book's publication (although certainly not entirely because of it!), and in part as a result of a series of conferences on practices, the discussion changed. To understand the problem of practices and its various solutions as discussed in *The Social Theory of Practices* and as the problem has evolved since then, we can start with a simple diagram of "classical" practice theories.

Begin with a box:

SOCIAL	**NONSOCIAL**
Cognitive/Social paradigms, *Weltanschauungen*, presuppositions, structures of consciousness or meaning, collective consciousness, systems of collective representations, tacit knowledge, the "rules" model in conversational analysis, the Searle of *Speech Acts*, etc.	*Cognitive/Nonsocial* artificial intelligence rule and symbolic representational model without sharing of rules.
Subcognitive/Social skills, *habitus*, mores," forms of life" and life-world, etc., conceived as "collective" (perhaps tradition in an Oakeshottian sense, probably in Shils' sense), Kripke's rules, collective intentions.	*Subcognitive/Nonsocial* habits, skills, etc., as the "tacit" part of an ensemble in which there are explicit parts (activities, rituals, performances, etc.) that the individual adjusts to.

The social/nonsocial divide refers to what can be thought of as location: whether a practice or worldview is understood to be located in some sort of supraindividual place such as "the social" or is no more than what exists within individual brains and bodies. A Kuhnian paradigm, presumably, is social and cognitive, because it is "shared" rather than individual, and because it consists of something like beliefs or premises or frameworks for seeing that are understood more or less on the model of premises. These distinctions are not very precise, it must be said, and in many settings not much hinges on separating, say, skills from beliefs. The families are closely related. But there are characteristically different emphases.

The "cognitive" family employs notions like rule, premise, structure of consciousness, collective representations, tacit knowledge, and so forth that involve close analogies with what can be directly articulated as roles, propositions, and so forth. What I am calling the subcognitive or "skills" family emphasizes the nonarticulable, that which may be indicated explicitly, such as the "judicial sense" of a good judge, but cannot usefully be described in terms of rules. One way of drawing this distinction is between propositional and nonpropositional knowledge (cf. Smith 1997). More recently the terminology, especially in the philosophy of cognitive science, includes conceptual and nonconceptual knowledge.[1]

The most common and familiar usages in both branches of the practice family are social, or collective, rather than individual. It is essential to the argument of Bourdieu, for example, that individual properties, such as dispositions, are constituted or produced by collective processes. One can quibble endlessly about what all these terms mean, but the basic point is this: Practices have both a causal primacy and a kind of autonomy in relation to the individual, what Emile Durkheim called externality ([1895] 1982: 38–43, 51–56). There is, however, a strong tradition of writing about practice-related concepts in which this kind of objectification or ontologization of collective notions is rejected by people who nevertheless seek to employ notions like tradition and skill and who also accord the "tacit" or the inarticulable a large and significant role. Michael Oakeshott, Gilbert Ryle, and Michael Polanyi are examples of this tendency.

The box indicates a set of possible solutions to a more or less common explanatory problem, but not the whole set. There are some, so to speak, "outside the box" solutions as well as denials of the problem itself. We can think of these as "post-classical" practice theories. Before turning to these, it will be useful to consider some of the inside the box issues that the outside the box solutions are attempting to avoid, and to explain, briefly, the argument of *The Social Theory of Practices*.

There are two basic issues about practice, which cut in different directions and divide the alternatives in the box. The first issue has to do with psychological agency, which is especially a problem for supraindividual accounts. Actions are individual, and so are brains, so there must be some individual psychological processes through which collective objects—such

as practices—operate. This relation may be as simple as the following: Language is a real substantive normative structure beyond individuals that individuals internalize or habituate in order to speak, form verbal thoughts, and the like. "Internalization" and "habit" are nevertheless facts about the individual language user in whom something must happen. So the structure is not causally autonomous in its operations, nor does it exist in a different collective dimension, or in an unrelated category of reality, spirit, or "the normative." And there is a problem of linking to the psychological.

The second issue is the problem of continuity or identity, which is a problem especially for individual accounts. Whatever a tradition is, it cannot exist solely in the individual. The individual dies and the tradition goes on. But how? There is no direct continuity from brain to brain or mind to mind—only continuity mediated by speech, objects, and activities. But a tradition seems to be something more than the sum of such parts. Or is it?

The Social Theory of Practices argued against the social or "shared" solutions to these theoretical problems. To say that people "share" presuppositions or practices means that they have the same presuppositions or practices. The usual argument for this is transcendental: People do something, such as communicate; they could not communicate unless they shared the same framework; therefore they share the same framework. This argument, which shows its neo-Kantian origins, mimics a standard strategy used by Polanyi and many others to argue that explicit rules are never sufficient and need to be supplemented by something tacit. But the argument that something extra (and tacit) is needed to explain, for example, communication or scientific discovery, is not the same as the argument for a shared framework or for the possession of the same practices. The argument for "sharing" or sameness requires us to believe that there is some mechanism by which the same rules, presuppositions, or practices get into the heads of different people. But if we consider the various possible strategies for solving this problem of transmission, we soon see that it is insurmountable. The claim that the same practices, presuppositions, and the like get into the heads of many people requires a means of transmission that is little short of magical.

The details of this argument are too complex to repeat here, but the point may be seen in a simple question: Can people obtain perfect reproductions of the tacit possessions of others? In other words, can people "share" extremely complex common frameworks? If so, how? What means do they have of acquiring these frameworks that are radically less error prone than ordinary explicit communication, which is notoriously error prone? To really share they must be error free. The means in question must be much more effective than ordinary "training," which is of course imperfect. I concluded that acquiring the tacit possessions that people need is an imperfect training—like a feedback process that could not guarantee that people would "share" anything tacit, but could only, like training at its most successful, assure that people had certain habituated capacities to

perform. Training of this sort only effects external similarities of performance: It tells us nothing about sameness of tacit possessions. Learning "from experience" is likely to produce an even greater diversity than formal training, because the feedback is uncontrolled rather than specifically designed to produce a specific kind of uniformity of response.

The "habituation" alternative to "sharing," once we look carefully, seems to accord better with what we know about the causal processes that actually operate in the world, especially in the brain, and with the known facts that practice theories purport to explain. This alternative account of what is going on when people learn to communicate, make scientific discoveries, and so forth, will be more plausible as an explanation because it does not appeal to any quasi-magical processes of transmission. Individual habituation (with the term being broadly construed to include all acquired learning that is tacit), I argued, does explain the same things, and we can even make some sense of such mysterious things as our common feelings by reference to the role of rituals and performances in inducing habits. This approach inverts the usual explanation of a tradition. The traditional view said that its rituals are performed because people share a common framework. I suggest that rituals are behavioral technologies that produce a certain uniformity of habits—but a uniformity that is literally superficial, a matter of external similarity, with internal or personal consequences that vary from individual to individual. Prayer, for example, has effects on those who pray. But the effects vary from person to person.

My way of thinking about this problem is summed up in the slogan I used at the end of the book, which revised Stanley Cavell's famous saying "We forget that we learn language and the world together" (1969: 19), by which he meant that the processes of learning the one were inseparable from the processes of learning the other. I said that we should add to this that "not only do we learn language and the world together, at the same time as we learn them we acquire habits that enable us to be more or less proficient in using both language and the world" (Turner 1994: 121). By this I meant that the processes of learning "objective," explicit, or public things were inseparable from tacit processes of habituation, what John Searle calls "the background." My point was that the feedback mechanisms of experience that produce habituation are personal, or individual, but at the same time bound up with learning an idiom, something "social," and experiencing the world, something "thingy."

POST-CLASSICAL PRACTICE THEORY

The arguments of *The Social Theory of Practices* were addressed primarily to what the book called "collective object" solutions to the problem of practices. The argument against these objects was that the mechanisms of transmission by which they would have to operate were so incredible

and unconnected to any known psychological reality that they couldn't be taken seriously. But solutions that appear to be "outside the box" and free from these problems emerged after the book was written. These I have called "ensemble" accounts of practices, and they fall into two basic groups: "material" accounts and nonmaterial accounts.

Two of the most fully developed accounts, those of Theodore Schatzki and Joseph Rouse, discussed the book and defined their alternatives in contrast to the book's emphasis on the causal character of practices. Both quote, and reject, a statement in *The Social Theory of Practices* about "the need to connect the stuff of thought to the world of cause and substance" (Turner 1994: 37; Schatzki 1996: 222; Rouse 2002: 170). Schatzki noted common ground with the book in the idea that a practice consists of doings and sayings. But, he argued, "although doings and sayings compose a practice by virtue of expressing an array of understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivity, these items . . . do not cause the doings and sayings involved" (1996: 106). Rouse similarly denied that practice was a causal concept. "Practice" for him is a normative concept; indeed, practices and normativity are mutually explanatory: Practices are intrinsically normative, because they divide actions into correct and incorrect, and dividing into correct and incorrect is a practical activity with no further grounding. Schatzki used different language and provided a more developed account of what a practice is, as indicated by the "array" or ensemble listed above, but also shares with Rouse both the idea of normativity (1996: 160) and a generally Heideggerian picture of the problem of practices in which the core is the (normative) relation of "mattering" between us and the world we experience.

For both Schatzki and Rouse, the way in which practices relate to behavior is through the life- world as produced by this relation of mattering. As Schatzki (1996: 107) puts it,

> to which practices a behavior belongs rests on the life conditions it expresses; and which conditions these are depends on the behavior, its contexts, and understandings of life conditions. The relevant understandings are mostly those interwoven into the actor's world, into the activity or contexts to which he or she is party. For things can be standing or going only in those ways for which his or her body, activities, contexts, and practices make room. And understandings of these ways are generally interwoven into and carried by the practices involved. Actions, understandings, and practices are thus holistically related.

"Express," "belong," and so forth are noncausal terms, and our dependence on conditions here is our dependence on the world as we experience it through our normative or mattering connection to it. This is the "always already" there world that Heidegger had in mind with the notion of *Dasein*, and this is what practice theory explains (or rather explicates, as

the relation between us and the world, on this account, is primordially one of mattering rather than cause and effect).

The problem of externality and continuity is solved by Schatzki with the notion of the coherence or hanging together (*Zusammenhang*) of practices, together with the idea that "integrative practices" themselves operate on practices producing coherence and "orchestration" between individuals, which in turn produces the "field of possibility" of the life-world. He acknowledged that "social theory's one-sided focus on commonality at the expense of orchestration," a failing he attributed to "Durkheim-Parsons-Habermas," makes it vulnerable (1996: 186–87). But he argued that "orchestration," or "co-existence within a practice" (1996: 187), which for him does not require complete sharing, avoids these vulnerabilities. Moreover, "a field of possibility is· not a candidate for reduction to individuals. It is emphatically the property of a practice" (1996: 186). Thus practices have a kind of distinctness from psychological cause and can be understood as noncausal, and not "shared" in a problematic sense. They are external and continuous because they are organized, and this organization, through integrative practices, is normative, and is thus, as he quotes Charles Taylor, "out there in the practices themselves" rather than "in the minds of the actors" (1996: 99–104).

A second kind of an ensemble approach shares a basic feature with this "normative" and anti-psychological approach to practices, but eliminates the normative element. Instead it identifies continuities elsewhere, namely with the objects or material culture that are shared by participants in a practice. Andrew Pickering has pioneered this approach (1995, 1997), and it has some obvious attractions. If a practice is simply an assemblage of objects which people employ, which has no inner directionality, then there is no problem of understanding its inner directionality or psychology. Continuity is simply a matter of the fact that people use or extend the use of the same assemblage of objects, or extend it by varying the assemblage by replacing one object with another without replacing them all.

This argument points to an important feature of the sociology of practices, which is that practices are often carried on around physical objects whose diffusion requires people to develop skills, habits, and so on to adapt to them. Thus the riding of horses by American Indians was certainly skilled, but perhaps owed little or nothing to European equestrian traditions, theories, and so forth. It was nevertheless a "practice," and whether there was anything borrowed along with the horses themselves from these European sources hardly matters much. The horse allowed for a new style of life, new modes of warfare, consumption, and residence—in short, a new culture. So one is tempted to get rid of the "allowed for a new culture" and the language of "field of possibility" understood in a normative way and just say, as Andrew Pickering does, that the machine consisting of the people and the objects—this cyborg—is all there is to the practice (1995).

Pickering's concern is primarily science, but the point may be generalized to the way of life of the horse-riding Indians. In its negative form, it is

this: Nothing in the way of special mental content, collective or individual, is essential to the notion of practice, or for that matter "culture." In its positive form, it is this: Practices, cultures, and so on are ensembles, with no essence, whose elements change over time because people use different things together with one another, which is all the "organization" there is to a practice. The ensembles persist or have continuity by virtue of, and only by virtue of, the persistence of the elements and their joint uses themselves. John Pickstone, who has produced a (partly) parallel argument about the history of science, uses the term "the 'thinginess' of life" (2001: 20) to capture this idea of the autonomy and imperviousness of material culture to absorption into the world of thought and theory, and the requirement that this world be addressed with skills rather than words.

The Social Theory of Practices was not an attempt to provide a new theory of practices, although it closed with a chapter on the question of how we should understand the body of phenomena that collective object theories of practice had sought to understand, but in light of the arguments that the book made about transmission and sharing. In short, it was an attempt to say what kind of causal account of the continuities underlying doings and sayings could be given other than an appeal to collective objects. The basic strategy of the chapter was to invert the implicit causal reasoning of classical practice theory, which started with mind, with the supposedly shared presuppositions that formed experience, and to ask what produced the habits of mind that were directly causally involved in doing and saying.

The book pointed to many features of social life that could do the causal job of accounting for habits which produced apparent uniformity: the common performances (with objects, requiring skills) and rituals of social life; memorialization that produces what appears as collective memory; and the way in which social interaction, even the reading of a text, requires habit formation. "Habit" was perhaps the wrong word, because it led readers to think the argument was more reductive than it was, but the idea was this: Practice and the persistence of practice could be accounted for sufficiently as mental phenomena of a familiar kind and did not require any kind of collective psychology, or any mysterious process of transmission or sharing.

The replacement for traditional notions of practice, which of course were, unlike the ensemble notions discussed here, psychological, was itself psychological, but not collective. It emphasized the individual learning trajectory and thus the uniqueness of the skills and habits that each individual acquired, but argued that known mechanisms for the production of the appearance of uniformity could account for this appearance. In short, the argument was that practices consisted of learnables and that the causal effects that were distinctively those of what was formerly called "practice" were the effects of the psychological fact of learning.

There is a difference in the *kinds* of continuity that each of these approaches considered significant. The "learnables" account took up the challenge of two major strands of classical practice theory, which emphasized the problem of tradition in both science and politics, specifically

liberalism. Polanyi made the point that scientific traditions were difficult to transplant—that just having the equipment and a bit of training was not enough to create a scientific tradition in a place that had none. This is a point that fits well with the practice of hiring junior scientists from labs where they had hands-on experience with particular scientific techniques: Just the equipment is not enough. The case of politics had deeper roots, in the problem that many nations had with transplanting "republican" or limited monarchy constitutions from their original Anglo-American contexts. Just having the laws was not enough. The constitutions routinely failed to produce the liberal political regimes that their drafters aspired to: Something else in the form of the relevant political culture or tradition, the practices of politics, was needed.

These particular problems of continuity pose problems for "nonpsychological" accounts of practices. But there is a sense in which choosing between the three noted successor post-classical accounts of practice is a matter of taste. As Schatzki suggests, they do not, "strictly speaking," conflict with one another except with respect to what they think needs to be explained (1996: 106). Each takes some of the material "explained" by classical practice theory and treats it as the thing that needs explanation.

These accounts do conflict with classical practice theory, although one can find many "post-classical" elements in writers like Bourdieu and Oakeshott. And they also have some different implications. Excluded accounts avoid the psychological, thereby avoiding the awkward questions about group minds that shadowed collective mentality forms of practice thinking. The identification of practices with learnables, unlike these nonpsychological accounts, leaves some hostages to fortune. It implies that practices are in some concrete sense in the brain, and this means the truth about learnability is something that goes on that fits with the actual properties of real brains, as the classical theory of practice does not. But the alternatives also leave some hostages: There are problems with "normativity." One can question whether a naturalistic explanation needs to explain nonnaturalistic facts, or even whether there are such facts to be explained. Does it commit to a dualistic metaphysics in which the normative is required, as it seems to in Rouse, some sort of noncausal, distinct realm of being? Does this dualism need to be overcome, as Rouse tries to overcome it, by a Heideggerian metaphysics of primordiality? In any event the accounts do have different implications, something that can be made clearer by considering them in the light of the problem of morality.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE

After the publication of *The Social Theory of Practices*, mirror neurons were discovered. This had important implications for the argument of the book. If the issue with practice theory was the transmission of practices,

mirror neurons provide an alternative to habituation or connectionist learning as a mechanism of acquisition. Moreover it is a mechanism that seems to provide an explanation of one of the puzzling cases examined in the book: Marcel Mauss's discussion of how, following the introduction of American movies in Paris after World War I, the way French women walked changed noticeably to become "American" (Mauss [1935] 1979; quoted in Turner 1994: 20–21).

The point of the example in the book was that noticing and identifying a practice depended on comparisons, in this case a comparison made possible by the expectations of French people who were familiar with women walking in a different way. Without this comparison, we would not recognize either the French or the American walk—what Mauss called *techniques du corps*—as a practice. But the example also pointed to a mode of transmission—through seeing something at the movies—that did not fit the model of connectionist learning, or indeed of any kind of learning, because it did not involve feedback. Mirror neurons provide an explanation of this: We are equipped with neurons which fire both when we perform certain bodily motions and when we see them performed. Because the neurons are the same, we are able to do what we see—to imitate without "learning" in the ordinary sense. So it seems that we have a preconceptual mode of imitation, and a mode in which we respond at the neuronal level to other people's movements and copy them for future reference.

How does this mechanism fit with the arguments of *The Social Theory of Practices*? The book, especially as I have summarized it here, hinged on an argument about sameness and transmission, and posed the following problem: How does any known mechanism of transmission produce sameness? Mirroring seems to be an answer to this question: It produces sameness by a neuronal mechanism. Or does it? There are two reasons why it does not help the older form of practice theory which made practices into collective objects that had to be reproduced in the individual. The mechanism of mirroring doesn't operate on anything collective or tacit, but rather on what someone can see or hear— paradigmatically physical movements. This relates to a point made in *The Social Theory of Practices*, that transmission must be understood to operate through "normal epistemic channels": The data for unconscious acquisitions is ordinary perceptual data—and what is seen is behavior, or "externals."

Some of the more aggressive statements of mirror neuron thinking appear to say that mirror neurons provide direct access to other minds, to motivations and intentions. If this were the case, a novel kind of copying, beyond the externals, would be taking place, and this might be a solution to the problem of transmission that could salvage some version of classical practice theory. But this is a misreading of the actual claims. Vittorio Gallese, who is often cited in support of this idea (Gallese and Metzinger 2003), doesn't say that we have actual knowledge of other people's goals via mirror neurons—just that they are the mechanisms for simulation. But

simulations are like hypotheses. We can't just "read" off the goals of others, but we can "construct" them (preconsciously)—as in Gallese and Metzinger (2003: 385). The term "construct" is a cognitive term here—it shows that the mirror neuron account assumes that we can only directly apprehend externals.

The "copying" done by mirror neurons is also not the kind needed by the older kind of practice theory. There is no feedback mechanism that assures that the copies are the same. And there is evidence that what is copied depends on the physical capacities of the people doing the copying. Dancers, for example, mirror something different from non-dancers when exposed to the same images of motion. Nor is this surprising. Millions of people watch Tiger Woods' golf swing every week, but none of them have copied it exactly, or for that matter very well. In this respect, then, mirroring as a copying mechanism is analogous to connectionist learning, in that what gets acquired depends on the individual history of the person doing the acquiring. It provides a mechanism for copying that is more rapid than trial and error, but not a mechanism for excluding error or directly transferring mental content, either from one person to another or from a collective object to an individual.

ETHICS AND PRACTICE

Classical practice theory and philosophical ethics came at the problem of morality from opposed points of view. Ethics was concerned with vindicating the universality and, therefore, the binding character of moral claims, and was befuddled by the diversity of morals. Practice theory in its classical form was designed as an account of diversity: Different practices produced different moral intuitions, beliefs, dispositions, and the like. The explanatory structure was more or less the same as the Marxist theory of "the superstructure," in which an underlying and hidden causal reality with a kind of directionality produced, or rather fit with, a visible body of ideas and beliefs. There was a degree of underdetermination, or space for alternative solutions, in this model. Different beliefs and ideas could be consistent with the underlying structure, which was determinative "in the last instance" rather than directly and mechanically.

Philosophical ethics has generally had trouble giving much content to the idea of universal moral truths. Some things do seem to be more or less universal, but in a functional sense. Every society has moral ideas and rules that do things to protect the weak from the strong, to minimize conflicts, and so forth. But the doctrines and theories that surround and justify the particular moral ideas of a given society are invariably different from those of other societies, so that the moral ideas, dispositions, and so forth of a given society taken as a whole are distinctive from and even alien to those of other societies.

The message of classical practice theory to ethics, consequently, was this: Explicit ethical ideas and moral rules are only very partial representations of a deeper and more fundamental set of facts which determine the conditions of ethical thought, feeling, and so forth. Moreover, these more fundamental facts are distinctive to particular settings or forms of life, so no meaningful "universality" is possible. The parallels to the case of science are revealing. In each case, formalizations of methods or theories partially illuminate the topic, but in the end fail to fully illuminate it. Theories of scientific inference and of the nature of scientific progress, similarly, have proven to be inadequate as accounts of the historical record in science. In the case of science, these inadequacies led to Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge as an essential element in scientific discovery (1967, [1958] 1998), to the study of tacit knowledge by the social studies of science, and to the recognition, in the economics of science, that tacit knowledge was valued and sought after in the marketplace of science.

The analogies between moral practice and science are not precise, but they are revealing. In science, new instruments and new methods allow us produce, or discover, new phenomena, that is to say, produce new possibilities, but they also constrain by providing new sources of resistance. What Pickering calls the mangle of practice—the term "mangle" is meant to evoke the wringer through which wet clothes were put in order to squeeze out the water—is the constraint that the world of tools places on our theorizing and experimenting, thus directing our practice. Moral practices, similarly, are constrained by the changing consequences of action in the world. This was one of MacIntyre's central points. The world itself changes in part through the efforts of individuals engaged in the practical business of living—of satisfying wants, including such generic wants as security and food, as well as such ideal wants, inherited from the patterns of action and satisfactions of the past, such as honor.

In both cases, then, there is what Pickering calls "resistance," by which he means the pushing back that is exhibited when tools don't work or experiments fail. In moral life, there is something about resistance and failure as well. When an individual's life strategies or choices don't work—in the manner of Sancho Panza—or produce unanticipated conflicts between two goods, such as money and respectability, that formerly could be achieved simultaneously or harmoniously, these conflicts prompt a need to theorize about the situation, or to imaginatively depict it in literature.

Even if we leave the notion of moral practice at this, at the level of coping with the resistances provided by circumstance and especially social circumstance, we have managed to say a great deal about the phenomenon of moral life. What practice means here is the external facts that persist and constrain us, that provide resistance to us. And there is a great deal that does so. If we parallel Pickering's idea that there are no constraints on our next step in science other than those provided by the tools at hand, and that the whole of the explanation of the continuity of practices is to be found

in the continuity of these objects, we have successfully de-mentalized the problem of ethics.

But there is something not quite satisfactory about this notion of practice, which we can see by the same device of trying to make it into an ethical theory. As an ethical theory, it would amount to the advice "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." But the point would also provide a warning that if one does not do as the Romans do, one faces resistance and difficulty in accomplishing anything. This seems truistic, but a bit thin to mean that the would-be moral hero who promotes a new ideal or the extension of an ideal from one area of life to another—equality into familial relations, for example—needs to think about whether it works, whether it conduces to the other goals that people have and regard as "good." The idea that there is nothing to ethics but these facts of resistance has an affinity to existentialist ethics. We have a wide range of free moral choice, in the manner of existentialism, and nothing to guide us, no obligations, virtues, and the like. But we are constrained nevertheless to do most of the things we would do anyway. We cannot abandon our children or fail to pay our bills without consequences, of course. Nevertheless, we have a choice to do these things or not do them, and it is these choices that make up our moral existence.

The idea that by practice we mean something encompassing the practical business of living also fits with the alternative presented by ensemble theorists like Schatzki and Rouse. But their accounts seem closer to moral experience. Both of these thinkers have in mind, as we have seen, a notion of practice in terms of lived experience, the life-world or *Dasein*, the world of concern to us. This is an amorphous idea, more amorphous than the idea of practice itself, but one can see why it is attractive. In the hands of Rouse, as I have said, practice is associated with normativity, and the notion of normativity is applied to any relation with the world or others. The obligation to tell truth in science, for example, is rooted, for Rouse, in the normative relation we have to the world—part of our concern for the world, one might say. For this kind of practice theorist, our experience of the world, for example, the world of our familial relations, is "always already" ethical or normative in character. Ethical theory merely abstracts this experienced world, unsuccessfully, into ethical theories which are at best very partial representations.

In some sense we may choose our practices and choose to revise our practices. Rouse says he is inspired by feminist philosophy of science, which he thinks is an improvement on the naturalistic approach to practice he finds in the social study of science. Using the idea of practice to show what it is that we have or can create alternatives about, then, is the service that practice ideas can give to ethical thinking. We thought we needed to think about physics in one way; now we have more than one, and we may morally prefer the new one.

Schatzki wrote a book on the practices of the Shakers (2002) and how the physical objects in the world of the Shakers were designed to produce

a practice, which is to say the kind of affective structure and experience of the world integrated externally to the individual, but which determine the individuals' experiences and thus their conduct. The message of the book to ethics is this: Our experiences of the world, and especially our experience of value, are structured by practices, not given. In this case, the construction of the life-world succeeded in producing a particular, and odd, moral outlook. One would understand the choice of a new practice in terms of the older practice that motivated the choice. One of Queen Victoria's granddaughters, a princess in the Russian royal family, chose to enter a convent, something that we can make intelligible as a royal act. And perhaps the kind of moral change in the direction of feminism of which Rouse approves can be understood in this way as well, that is to say as choices to change from one practice to another within the original practice.

The "learnables" approach to practices has a naturalistic approach to morality. Oakeshott, in "Rationalism in Politics," says that "moral ideals are a sediment; they have significance only so long as they are suspended in a religious or social tradition" (1962b: 36). The dominant moral ideologies of the present, he suggests, "are in fact the desiccated relic of what was once the unselfconscious moral tradition of an aristocracy who, ignorant of ideals, had acquired a habit of behavior in relation to one another" (1962b: 35). This puts the issue clearly; moral theories, of whatever kind, as theories, are necessarily abstractions from the rich pattern of conduct that we call ethical. They are tips of an iceberg. But the bottom of the iceberg, the religious or social tradition, is made up, at least in part, of a "habit of behavior in relation to one another." Such habits are natural facts, in the brains of people.

The learnables account also stresses the idea that learnables exist and produce their effects on our mental processes at the tacit or unconscious level. In this sense, learnables are like the furniture of the world, and like this furniture provide resistance. "When in Rome, do as the Romans" is good advice with respect to externals. But Flannery O'Connor had a point when she said, "When in Rome, do as you done in Milledgeville" (O'Connor [1979] 1988: 220). The path of least resistance is often one of less resistance to known learnings, to the internal furniture of the mind. We can think of this furniture as hard and soft. The hardest furniture is those habits of inference without which we cannot act—the most fundamental habits pointed to by Hume. This hard furniture shades off into the hardwired, into the architecture. It is an empirical question as to where the line is. The softer furniture includes such things as our moral intuitions and our sense of the good. They are acquired, as Oakeshott put it, as "a habit in relation to one another," and in relation to the world. Like the habit of causal reasoning, our intuitions are tips of icebergs, and the below water parts are inaccessible to us, even through reflection. The softest of mental furniture consists of what Oakeshott called intimations, when he spoke of politics as the pursuit of intimations, and what Polanyi thought of as the

precognitions which precede scientific discovery. They fit with the learnable model of these mysterious tacit hints that direct our thought and reflect the kind of preconscious learning that Polanyian psychologists have demonstrated experimentally (Reber 1989).

This conceptual mental furniture picture fits with cognitive science. Cognitive neuroscience both supports and radicalizes the basic idea that practices operate largely as part of what Searle calls "the Background." It supports the idea first by showing how much goes on in the brain in support of our thinking and doing other than what we are conscious of or can access through theories which extend our common sense models of the mind, such as the notion that we "assume" things in order to act or reason. It provides additional support by providing evidence of the actual brain processes that occur when we think and act, for example through fMRI studies. It radicalizes the basic idea by undermining the folk psychology we use to speak of thinking and doing, such as the idea that we "assume" things, that our decisions are wholly conscious affairs, and that we have "intentions" about which we have accurate knowledge. Showing that this language is suspect, that at best it represents only a small part of the causally relevant processes, and does so inaccurately, cuts off a large class of potential objections which rely on these ideas. Even "the normative," or at least the thinking that corresponds to what is conventionally called normative, leaves distinctive traces in certain parts of the brain. The learnables model of practices coheres with this radicalization. The message to ethical theory remains the same as Oakeshott's theoretical abridgements of practices have their place as ideological tool kits to apply in new settings; they are unable to adequately represent the amorphous but real things we call practices.

Adding the resources of cognitive neuroscience also allows us to underline the plausibility of the learnables account. Learnability provides its own discipline: It is impossible to learn something that does not, in some sense, "work." Of course, the setting in which what one learns "works" well enough to learn may be very odd, and the things learned may be, from an external perspective, very strange. In the case of moral conduct, it may be as convenient to believe in the abominations of Leviticus as it is to be sickened by the betrayal of a friend. But neither would be learned, and by "learned" here we mean "connected to the parts of the brain that involve the relevant kinds of affectual responses," if they did not provide positive feedback in a given environment. Learning also involves what we may think of metaphorically as the economy of the brain itself, so that practical conflicts and contradictions can't be learned: This gives some sense to Oakeshott's idea that rationality is a matter of seeking coherence, and this allows us to account for the fact of the "organization" of practices that is central to Schatzki's account, but which he treats as necessarily external. It also gives a sense to such arguments as Max Weber's discussion of rational theodicies, that is, the consistent sets of beliefs, rare in the history

of religion, that squarely faced and reconciled the omnipotence of God and the existence of evil. Weber pointed out that the rarity of the beliefs reflected the fact that the reconciliations produced so much angst that they were impossible for one to live with as a human being and were suited only to theology texts ([1915] 1946: 358–59). Angst is a constraint like the others we have discussed here, but one that in this case arises within the brain in response to unbearable truths.

Let me close with this. Morality is often a matter of reconciling, seeking coherence, as Oakeshott says—the constraints of living in Rome in actuality and living in Milledgeville in one's mind, between what is immediately convenient and workable and what one has learned in the past and learned at a very deep level. Practice ideas at their best remind us of this conflict, and remind us that there is no theory that will ever resolve it.