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EMPIRICAL PHILOSOPHY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT: This article takes the first steps towards a new approach in applied philosophy, in the hope to encourage an idea of philosophy as a more empirical subject. Part I will provide an overview of the nature and scope of applied philosophy, followed in Part II by a critical evaluation of the "top-down" methodology still popular with many applied philosophers. Part III will then describe the basic axioms of "empirical philosophy," explaining how the empirical approach differs from the top-down approach. Part IV will provide a reply to the standard criticism regarding the proposed marriage between empirical research and philosophy. Part V will test the validity of "empirical philosophy" on practical terms.

The aim of this article is to explore a methodologically innovative way of doing applied philosophy. I will refer to this approach, which is inspired by the work of Jonathan Glover, as "empirical philosophy." In the opening chapter to *Humanity*, his haunting moral history of the twentieth century, Glover says that he hopes to encourage an idea of ethics as a more empirical subject.¹ Unfortunately Glover does not tell us in any detail what it means to make ethics more empirical, and apart from some general comments, the idea of turning ethics into a more empirical subject remains elusive and obscure. Glover indicates the general direction in which ethics should move, but he does not provide us with a clear route mapping how to proceed. This article attempts to add some substance to Glover's aspiration by indicating a possible methodology for empirical philosophy.

Part I will start by giving an overview of the nature and scope of that branch of philosophy known as "applied philosophy," followed in Part II by a critical evaluation of the "top-down" methodology popular amongst many applied philosophers. Part III will then describe the basic axioms of "empirical philosophy," showing how the empirical approach differs from the top-down approach. Part IV will reply to the standard criticism of the proposed marriage between empirical research and philosophy. Part V will put the "empirical philosophy" approach into practice, by exploring the theoretical literature and empirical findings on exploitation.

PART I. APPLIED PHILOSOPHY

Applied philosophy is that branch of philosophy that refuses to admit that philosophy has nothing to say about the pressing dilemmas of life. That practical moral questions are a legitimate area of research is a belief shared by the growing number of philosophers, in fact applied philosophy is arguably the fastest growing of all branches of philosophy.² While some form of applied philosophy is as old as philosophy itself, in terms of its contemporary identity the publication of Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* in 1979 helped to define applied philosophy for the present generation. The publication of Singer's *Practical Ethics* was followed by a number of new journals in applied philosophy, including the *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* (formerly *Applied Philosophy*) in 1982, the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* in 1984, and *Bioethics* (co-edited by Peter Singer) in 1987.

Peter Singer was one of the earliest, and is still today one of the most influential crusaders of applied philosophy. In the introduction to his most recent anthology, *Writings on an Ethical Life*, Singer points out that his first article in practical ethics was "Moral Experts,"³ published in 1972. "Since its appearance in 1972, the field has changed dramatically, though not, I am fairly sure, because of any influence that essay may have had. More probably, the article was a sign of times that were already changing."⁴ Singer is probably right when he says that by 1972 change was in the air, nevertheless all successful revolutions need to identify with a leader, and Singer was able and willing to wear the mantle. His 1975 book on *Animal Liberation*⁵ give him the credentials, but perhaps in terms of promoting applied philosophy, *Practical Ethics* from 1979 was even more important, for it helped to define a whole new branch of philosophy, not just a solution to a single ethical problem.

In the Preface to his *Practical Ethics*, Peter Singer explains the aims and scope of his book as follows: "Practical ethics covers a wide area. We can find ethical ramifications in most of our choices, if we look hard enough."⁶ Singer goes on to explain that although his book does not attempt to cover the whole area of practical ethics, it deals with problems that have been selected on two grounds: relevance (issues that any thinking person must face), and the extent to which philosophical reasoning can contribute to discussion of them. Practical ethics is therefore an "area," that is to say, a specific domain on which philosophers are asked to exercise their skills.⁷ In other words, just like epistemology is concerned with the domain of knowledge, or philosophy of religion with questions relating to the existence of God, practical ethics is concerned with the practical issues of life.

Applied or practical philosophy tends to define its identity in terms of the areas on which it wants to draw the philosophical spotlight. Applied philosophy covers all philosophical research that has a bearing on issues of practical concern. Like other branches of philosophy, applied philosophy is not constrained by a single aim or methodology. In fact, it could be argued that diversity is arguably applied philosophy's major asset. In terms of its scope, applied philosophy can either suggest solutions to a problem, or simply pose and explicate problems that need to be resolved. In ethics for example, if applied philosophy is expected to provide "solutions" to practical ethical issues then, as Jef Van Gerwen suggests, three sorts

of methods emerge as dominant ways of conceiving it: the model of the legal code; the case method; and the method of corporate or institutional analysis.⁸ But in fact the usefulness of theory goes beyond giving us "solutions" to the pressing issues of the day: as Onora O'Neill rightly reminds us, we need moral theory in order to recognize a problem as being a moral problem at all,⁹ hence applied philosophy is not only about suggesting solution to ethical problems.

Apart from its wide-ranging scope, applied philosophy is also characterised by its methodological diversity. In what follows, two fundamentally different methodologies to be found within the broad spectrum of applied philosophy will be scrutinised. I will refer to the first as the "top-down approach," and the second as the "empirical approach." While these two alternative approaches are diametrically opposed, it is important to emphasize that both methodologies are legitimate to the extent that both approaches have a role to play in applied philosophy. Having said that, the aim of this article is to suggest that applied philosophy has much to gain from venturing beyond the top-down approach at one end, and shifting towards the empirical approach at the other end of the spectrum.

PART II. THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH

The top-down approach is the oldest methodology within applied philosophy. It is also arguably the most common. This is not surprising, considering the term *applied philosophy* itself. Why "applied"? What does the act of "applying" convey in terms of the methodology?¹⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that "to apply" means "to bring into nearness or contact with something; put on, upon, or to." This suggests that to apply X to Y assumes that X and Y exist independently of each other. Thus for example the sentence:

Next weekend I am going to apply a second coating of paint on the kitchen door

assumes that something called "paint" and something else called "kitchen door" exist independently of each other, and that the act of applying "paint" to the "kitchen door" simply refers to the act of spreading the paint upon the kitchen door. Similarly, the sentence:

Next year I am going to apply myself to the study of metaphysics

assumes that "I" and "metaphysics" co-exist independently of one another, and the act of "applying myself" is simply going to bring the two closer together.

The top-down approach takes the meaning of "applied" in applied philosophy literally. There are three stages to the top-down approach:

Stage I: A Priori Reasoning

Since philosophical reasoning is logically separate and independent from any problem of practical concern, it follows that philosophical reasoning is by definition *a priori*. At this stage, there is nothing distinguishing practical ethics or applied philosophy from any other branch of philosophy. As Bertrand Russell pointed out, there are two fundamental characteristics of philosophical propositions:

In the first place a philosophical proposition must be general. It must not deal specially with things on the surface of the earth, or with the solar system, or with any other portion of space and time. . . . This brings us to a second characteristic of philosophical propositions, namely, that they must be *a priori*. A philosophical proposition must be such as can be neither proved nor disproved by empirical evidence."¹¹

A priori means "prior to experience," and it is the opposite of empirical or a *posteriori*, meaning "based on experience."

Stage II: Deductive Reasoning

Having formulated the philosophical propositions *a priori*, one subsequently searches for case studies (real or hypothetical) to test its hypothesis. Because the propositions and the case studies are researched independently of each another, the top-down approach is deductive in nature. This means that methodologically the top-down approach is theory-driven: the proposition, which comes first, is combined to already existing case studies for the sake of testing its validity.

Stage III: The Supportive Role of Case Studies

When directed to pressing everyday matters, the *a priori*, deductive reasoning of the top-down approach confines case studies to a supportive role. Because propositions are constructed independently of empirical investigations, the top-down approach allows for applied philosophy to be practiced from the comfort of one's armchair. Case studies, real or hypothetical, are used simply as evidence to corroborate an independently defined ethical theory. In fact, there can even be a division of labour, whereby someone works on the theory while someone else tests the theory on practical issues.

To recap, there are three key stages in the top-down approach. First, X (the proposition that is being applied) and Y (the area or issue that the proposition is applied to) are logically independent of each other. Second, X and Y interact in a pre-determined, deductive fashion. Third, X is primary, and Y secondary, since Y's role is simply to be supportive of X.

The top-down approach is pervasive in the literature in applied philosophy. In a thought-provoking essay from 1988, Frances Myrna Kamm dissects the way applied ethics is usually practiced with exemplary clarity. She reminds us that generally speaking, the method used to solve practical problems "is the application of general ethics and philosophical reasoning."¹² Of course the application of general ethics and philosophical reasoning can take different forms, indeed Kamm suggests four different ways, depending on whether the starting point is a full theory, a very firm core concept, a list of factors that are considered ethically relevant, or a set of general principles. Whatever form it takes, the important point Kamm emphasizes is that "decisions about cases derive from theories."¹³ Kamm refers to this as a "unidirectional flow."¹⁴

It is precisely because of its unidirectional flow that the top-down approach has clear limitations. As Kamm suggests, "philosophers should try to bring "real-life" problems (and those who have them) *up* to the abstractions of philosophy, rather than just bring philosophy down to the level of the problems."¹⁵ In what follows,

I am going to suggest an alternative way of doing applied philosophy. I will call this the "empirical approach." It is to this new approach that I turn to next.

PART III. THE EMPIRICAL APPROACH

As Glover is the inspiration behind what I am calling "empirical philosophy," it is necessary to quote Glover at some length here, as he both rejects what I have referred to as the top-down approach, as well as hinting at an empirical alternative:

It is possible to assume too readily that a set of moral principles simply needs to be "applied." The result can be the mechanical application of some form of utilitarianism, or list of precepts about justice, autonomy, benevolence and so on. When this happens, the direction of thought is all one way. The principles are taken for granted, or "derived" in a perfunctory way and practical conclusions are deduced from them. What is missing is the sense of two-way interaction. The principles themselves may need modifying if their practical conclusions are too Procrustean, if they require us to ignore or deny things we find we care about when faced with the practical dilemmas.¹⁶

It is interesting to note that Glover singles out utilitarianism as one of the chief adherents of the top-down approach. In fact, Peter Singer's work is a perfect example of how to deduce practical conclusions from utilitarian premises. Even Robert Goodin, whose own brand of utilitarianism is very sophisticated, is aware of this problem:

One of the great advantages of utilitarianism has always been that it promises to yield determinate, no-nonsense advice on practical matters of what one should do. One of its great disadvantages has always been that it has a tendency to do so (at least in the hands of its most brusque, no-nonsense practitioners) in a singularly formulaic way. List the alternatives, list the consequences, attach utility numbers to each and crank the adding machine's handle. Nothing could be easier. But critics say (with some considerable justification), nothing quite so easy could possibly be right.¹⁷

Even if we give Goodin the benefit of the doubt, the fact remains that the top-down approach is still very popular with applied philosophers. This is true of many of utilitarian persuasion, although utilitarianism does not have a monopoly on the top-down approach. In fact in Part V below, the Marxist theory of exploitation will come under critical scrutiny for adopting the top-down approach.

In what follows an alternative to the top-down approach will be discussed. In order to see how the empirical approach differs from the top-down approach, it will be necessary to compare and contrast these two methodologies. Like in the case of the top-down approach, the empirical approach can also be broken down into three stages:

Stage I: Empirical Research

According to the empirical approach, the starting point of a philosophical project is not *a priori* reasoning, but empirical research itself. Ideally, the philosopher will be in a position to carry out the empirical research in person. Of course this is not always possible, or even desirable, as it would considerably restrict the

pool of legitimate scholars researching in empirical philosophy. For example, it would mean that only doctors or nurses could publish in medical or nursing ethics, apart from the few notable exceptions of philosophers trained in these fields of expertise. If philosophers were always expected to engage in personal empirical research before publishing their findings, very little research would be undertaken, which could potentially undermine everything applied philosophy has achieved in the last thirty years.

Alternatively, instead of expecting philosophers to carry out empirical research in person, one could stipulate the condition of requiring that philosophers read the primary sources, instead of relying exclusively on what they read by fellow philosophers in philosophy journals. In other words, just as an expert on the philosophy of Descartes is expected to read the relevant historical documents from the seventeenth century, a philosopher interested in medical ethics should make an effort to read research coming out of medical journals.

Of course to a great extent this is already happening, and many applied philosophers are not afraid to engage with empirical material, even those who start off with a fixed normative theory that is then "applied" on the empirical data collected. In terms of defining the empirical approach, and distinguishing it from the top-down approach, the major difference is that the empirical approach is problem-driven, whereas the top-down approach is theory-driven. In a theory-driven methodology, theories are elaborated and modified in order to save their universal character. Data no longer test theories; instead, theories continually impeach and elude data. In a problem-driven methodology, theories are elaborated by reference to the requirements of viable empirical testing.¹⁸ This distinction between theory-driven and problem-driven research captures the fundamental difference between the top-down approach and the empirical approach.

According to the empirical approach, a philosopher should approach an empirical problem if not with a *tabula rasa*, at least with an open mind. Of course all philosophers (and all empirical researchers) hold views of a theoretical nature before they start their research, something that even Popper was prepared to acknowledge. Yet initial theoretical assumptions should not determine the nature and scope of the empirical research. At this stage the philosophical baggage that any philosopher inevitably brings to the field-work ought to be used to define the puzzle that is going to be investigated, rather than provide hypotheses that only require corroboration.

Stage II: Reflective Equilibrium

After this initial stage of empirical research, the empirical philosopher proceeds to construct a preliminary theory based on the empirical findings of Stage I. Starting from an empirical basis and working upward towards theory is clearly different from the top-down approach that finds favour with many applied philosophers. Yet it would be a mistake to think that what distinguishes the empirical approach from the top-down approach is induction rather than deduction. Empirical philosophy is both inductive *and* deductive. Once the empirical research is done, and the theory is constructed, the empirical philosopher will go back to the empirical research to re-examine the data, then back to the theory to perfect it, and so on.

This method will be familiar to scholars of John Rawls's theory of justice, in fact the best way of capturing what goes on at this stage is in terms of what Rawls calls the method of reflective equilibrium.¹⁹ This method can be applied to issues of applied ethics more generally, as Glover is also quick to point out:

Many philosophers are sympathetic to a more pragmatic form of ethics, where principles are put forward tentatively, in the expectation that they will be shaped and modified by our responses to practical problems. The mutual adjustment between principles and our intuitive responses is the process leading to what John Rawls has called, perhaps optimistically, "reflective equilibrium." But the pragmatism could be taken further, to encompass the idea that our ethical beliefs should also be revisable in the light of an empirical understanding of people and what they do.²⁰

The empirical approach fully endorses Rawls's reflective equilibrium. The crucial point is that an empirical philosopher must be prepared to go "back and forth," be inductive and deductive, until an equilibrium is reached where philosophical theory and the empirical data coincide. In part V below, an example will be given of how a theory of exploitation can be constructed via a process of reflective equilibrium that starts with certain empirical findings.

Stage III: The Determining Role of Case Studies

In the empirical approach, the research based on empirical case studies is a major input into the construction of a philosophical theory. This means that case studies play a determining role in the philosophical reasoning, and not just a supportive role as in the case of the top-down approach. Applied philosophy is built up from the ground, not deduced from the top.

Diagram 1 below highlights the differences between the top-down approach and the empirical approach:

	TOP-DOWN APPROACH	EMPIRICAL APPROACH
STAGE I	<i>A priori</i> philosophy first, case studies second	Empirical research first, general theorising second
STAGE II	Deductive reasoning	Deductive and inductive reasoning; Reflective Equilibrium
STAGE III	Case studies play supportive role	Case studies play determining role

Diagram 1: Two Approaches in Applied Philosophy

Having compared the top-down approach to the empirical approach, and having suggested that the latter has a clear advantage over the former, it is perhaps opportune at this point to respond to those critics that say that philosophy is, by definition, non-empirical, therefore empirical philosophy is, at best, an oxymoron.

PART IV. WHAT IS EMPIRICAL CANNOT BE PHILOSOPHICAL: A RETORT

A possible counter-argument to the empirical approach defended in this article is that this approach has nothing to do with philosophy, and empirical philosophy, whatever it is, cannot be passed as philosophy. Philosophers are not supposed to get their hands dirty with empirical findings. This is not (I presume) because philosophers are too good for this type of work, but because direct contact with empirical data may corrupt their philosophical senses. As Russell said, a philosophical proposition should not deal specifically with things on the earth, the solar system, or with any other portion of space and time. A proper philosopher is therefore someone who deals with abstract reasoning, and only with abstract reasoning.²¹

This characterisation, or caricature, of philosophy should be resisted. Far from being alien to the philosophical method, the methodology of empirical philosophy outlined in this article aims to recapture the way philosophers used to operate in the seventeenth century; René Descartes, one of the most influential philosophers of all time, was a philosopher and a scientist, and his philosophy grew out of and benefited from his scientific research. Descartes is perhaps the first empirical philosopher of the modern world. In his correspondence with the French philosopher Marin Mersenne, Descartes explains how his philosophical views on human nature and the mind is borne by his empirical research:

My discussion of man in *The World* will be a little fuller than I had intended, for I have undertaken to explain all the main functions in man. I am now dissecting the heads of various animals, so that I can explain what imagination, memory, etc. consist in.²²

I have spent much time on dissection during the last eleven years, and I doubt whether there is any doctor who has made such detailed observations as I. But I have found nothing whose formation seems inexplicable by natural causes.²³

There is still much to learn from Descartes's method. Just as Descartes dissected the head of a cow to see how the mind works, philosophers should also be prepared to allow empirical research to be an input into their theory. In fairness, philosophy of mind seems to have learned this lesson. Many contemporary philosophers of mind are not opposed to empirical research, although regrettably they still represent the exception rather than the rule.²⁴

So far the case for empirical philosophy has been made in abstract terms. In what follows, by exploring the theoretical and empirical literature on exploitation, an attempt will be made to put empirical philosophy into practice.

PART V. EXPLOITATION—EMPIRICAL PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

To "exploit" is to use, and "exploitation" is the act of using another person for one's own advantage. The literature on exploitation is for the most part theory-driven, Marxism being the theory in question. According to the Marxist tradition, it is the unequal exchange of labour or the inequality in access to the means of production that explains the phenomenon of exploitation.²⁵ Furthermore the motive or reasons for exploiting another person is explained in terms of a desire by

the exploiters to secure an economic advantage by extracting surplus value from the exploited. In other words, what is motivating the exploiter to take advantage of the exploited is the desire for profit, and exploitation is simply a means to this economic end.

Driven by this theory, Marxists have looked for evidence of exploitation in capitalist society, with some notable success. In the case of Latin America, exploitation is a fact of life for millions of people. For example in Guatemala, from colonial time to the present, exploitation is and has always been ubiquitous. Starting from the sixteenth century, exploitation in Guatemala can be traced back to the expropriation of land by the colonial government. The new landowners needed a limitless amount of labourers to work their holdings, which was conveniently provided by the landless Indian population. Different forms of forced labour were put in place, from the *encomienda* (which reduced entire communities to serfdom), to the *mita* (whereby all Indians were obliged to work a set number of weeks each year for the big landowners) to the *repartimiento* (whereby colonial landowners made requests to governmental officials for specific numbers of labourers from the Indian community). Debt slavery became common later in the seventeenth century. By accepting advanced money, individual Indians were obliged to migrate to plantations in order to work off debts at very low wages. In the 1930s, General Jorge Ubico introduced vagrancy laws, which meant that Indians (*jornaleros*) had to work between 100 and 150 days a year for large landowners, whether or not they were in debt.²⁶

All the historical evidence is pointing to inequality in land ownership as the circumstances of exploitation, vindicating the Marxist theory of exploitation. It also points to the desire to secure an economic benefit as the driving motive for exploiting the labour of indigenous Indians. Indeed this analytical framework can still be used to explain exploitation in contemporary Guatemala.²⁷ Poverty and exploitation are rampant in Guatemala today.²⁸ The 80,000 Guatemalans who toil in sweatshops (*maquilas*) earn a daily wage of \$2.50, while suffering dehumanising conditions: they are forced to work overtime without pay; female employees are prohibited from becoming pregnant; workers are denied medical visits; female workers are constantly subjected to sexual harassment.²⁹

As the above examples indicate, one can find many empirical facts that corroborate the top-down, theory-driven Marxist model of exploitation. Yet this is precisely the problem. The examples of exploitation used in the literature on exploitation are invoked simply to confirm the validity of the Marxist model. That is to say, the case-studies (of exploitation) play a supporting role for a theory (Marxism) that is independently and comprehensively established. Yet, there is more to exploitation than the desire to secure an economic benefit by taking advantage of unequal bargaining powers, as suggested by the Marxist approach. These other cases of exploitation tend to go undetected by the top-down approach. That is to say, the reasons that make some people exploit others cannot be fully captured by the economic motive to make a profit. But in order to explore the other motives or reasons behind the act of exploitation, it is necessary to abandon the dominant Marxist approach to exploitation. A different understanding

of exploitation will develop if this approach is replaced by a more empirical, problem-driven approach.

If instead of starting with a theory of exploitation (in our case the Marxist theory), which we then corroborate by way of empirical examples, we start with a set of empirical problems regarding exploitation, our understanding of this phenomenon will fundamentally change. For example, there are a number of empirical findings regarding exploitation in Guatemala that do not fit the Marxist theory as explained above. That is because when exploitation occurs in Guatemala, it is often not conducted in a way that maximises the economic advantage to the exploiter. This fact alone would seem to indicate that there are other motives at play apart from economic advantage.

Melvin Tumin's 1952 anthropological study of a peasant community poses an interesting empirical puzzle for a theory of exploitation. It shows that ladino workers were paid twice as much as indigenous Indian workers, even though Indian workers are generally more skilled and productive than ladino employees.³⁰ According to the logic of modern economics, one would expect the more productive and skilful workers to be remunerated accordingly, since it is in the interest of the employer to provide good workers with the right incentives. Thus if the motive behind exploitation was purely economic, one would expect to find indigenous Indian workers being paid more than ladino workers. But that is not the case in Guatemala. This suggests that while economic exploitation is predominant, there is also evidence of a more perverse, mischievous motivation behind the exploitation of Mayan Indians that is not captured by the Marxist theory.

A related empirical puzzle is the fact that Guatemalan Indians have always been, and still are, treated as inferior beings. As Tumin points out, "no Ladino employee of a Ladino employer is treated with the same disrespect and harshness as that accorded the most ill-treated Indian. . . . Ladino workers get better treatment than do Indians in the same status, Indians are reprimanded more harshly, expected to do harder and longer work, and are more peremptorily ordered about."³¹ In fact the most common complaint by Mayan Indians is that they treat them "as animals," although for reasons that go beyond economic motives.³² In terms of understanding exploitation, this suggests that intertwined with the economic motive, there is also another motive at play: the desire to humiliate and degrade indigenous Indians. The humiliation suffered by the Guatemalan Indians is a recurring theme in the literature on Guatemala.³³ Yet this humiliation cannot and should not be reduced to economic motives.³⁴ In Guatemala, the desire to humiliate and degrade Mayan Indians can be a sufficient reason per se for exploiting them, apart from any economic advantage that may arise from the exploitation. This alternative motive ought to be taken into account by a comprehensive theory of exploitation.

According to the methodology of empirical philosophy, Tumin's case-study on peasant community in Guatemala, or the many case-studies on the humiliation of the Indigenous Indians, are not used simply as supporting evidence for a theory of exploitation. Instead these case studies, together with all the other well-known case-studies of economically motivated exploitation, provide an initial input on the way we theorise the problem of exploitation. Starting from

these case-studies, theorising about exploitation reaches a reflective equilibrium when both economic and non-economic motives are taken into account. For the reflective equilibrium to be reached, the theory-driven approach must be replaced, at least at the initial stages, by a problem-driven approach grounded on empirical research.

The desire to humiliate or degrade another person is part of the phenomenon of exploitation.³⁵ If to exploit means taking advantage of another for one's own advantage, then apart from the economic advantages of exploitation, we must also look for the non-economic advantages gained by the exploiter from humiliating and degrading another person. For example, the advantages that arise from defining one's identity in a certain way. There is a long tradition in philosophy that accounts for identity as the mental process whereby a mode of consciousness is defined through the negation of another object. This is the case of the master-slave dialectic, where masters paradoxically treat their slaves as less than human while at the same time they need the gratitude of their slaves in order to define themselves as moral human beings.³⁶ This analysis can be taken one step further: the reason for wanting to humiliate or degrade others is not simply to identify with a moral human being, but more specifically to identify with power. The key to the desire to identify with power, which should not be confused with the more general desire "for power," lies in the concept of identity in general, and the process of identity formation in particular. Identity is based on differentiation, and differentiation upon rejection, even disgust, which explains the act of degrading and humiliating. In other words, identity relates to what is being rejected via the process of differentiation.³⁷

It is important to emphasise that the desire to humiliate and degrade is part of the general phenomenon of exploitation, as it conforms with the conventional English usage of the term, whereby to exploit means to "utilize." By morally abusing the Indians, ladinos use—therefore exploit—the Guatemalan Indians in order to identify with power. In Guatemala to be a ladino means, first and foremost, to be not an Indigenous Indian. Ladinos also have a firm grip on all the spheres of power in Guatemalan society: the economic (as land-owners), the political (as politicians and bureaucrats) and the military (as high-ranking officers). It follows that ladino identity is formed and reinforced by the process of exclusion of what is marked out as inferior.

The reflective equilibrium on exploitation suggests that the exploiter is not merely taking advantage of another person's vulnerability for the sake of securing an economic gain or benefit, as suggested by the theory-driven, top-down approach common in the Marxist literature. Instead the act of degrading and humiliating a vulnerable person is the exploiter's way of differentiating oneself from those considered to be inferior, therefore elevating oneself to a position of superiority, and in the process identifying with power.³⁸ A comprehensive theory of exploitation must take into account both aspects of exploitation. This is more likely to occur if a top-down (theory-driven) approach is replaced by an empirical (problem-driven) approach.

PART VI: CONCLUSION

Applied philosophy is primarily concerned with making a theoretical contribution to some issue of practical concern. From a methodological point of view, there are different ways of doing this. One dominant approach is to "apply" an independently worked-out theory on to a problem, in order to come up with a solution. This is the top-down approach, which deduces conclusions from theoretical premises. While popular and instructive, this approach has the disadvantage of being unidirectional (Kamm), mechanical (Glover), and formulaistic (Goodin). The alternative to the top-down approach is the empirical approach, which embraces Rawls's reflective equilibrium by being both inductive and deductive, and uses empirical research as an input to the process of theorizing. This article is not suggesting that the top-down approach should be abandoned *tout court*, as there are valuable lessons to be learned from it. What is being suggested is that there is also something to be learned from a problem-driven, empirical approach.

The case of exploitation in Guatemala was invoked to expose the limitations of the top-down, theory-driven approach. While the Marxist theory of exploitation has come under criticism in this article, the intention is not to suggest that the Marxist theory of exploitation is wrong, or fruitless. Marxism has a great deal to offer in terms of our understanding of exploitation. The problem is not with Marxism *per se*, but with the way Marxists apply their theory, which generally tends to be along the lines of a top-down, theory-driven approach.

All moral and political theories can be applied according to the top-down approach, or the empirical approach. This article is suggesting that Marxists should embrace the empirical approach. The same is true for utilitarianism. In this article utilitarianism also came under some criticism for adopting a top-down, theory-driven method. This should not be read as an unconditional rejection of utilitarianism, but as an invitation to utilitarian philosophers to abandon the top-down approach. In the last analysis, whatever theory one wishes to apply, there is an empirical way of doing so which is not unidirectional, not mechanical and not formulaistic.

Endnotes

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8. J. Van Gerwen "Three Methods in Applied Ethics," in R. Chadwick and D. Schroeder (eds.) *Applied Ethics: Critical Concepts in Philosophy, Vol. 1: Nature and Scope*, London: Routledge, 2002.
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10. Singer is also committed to the act of "applying," as the opening sentence of the first chapter of his book *Practical Ethics* shows: "This book is about practical ethics, that is about the application of ethics or morality—I shall use the terms interchangeably—to practical issues," 1.
11. B. Russell, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy," in H. W. Johnstone Jr. (ed.) *What is Philosophy?*, New York: Macmillan 1965, 37–8. Originally from B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1929.
12. F. M. Kamm, "Ethics, Applied Ethics, and Applying Applied Ethics," in D. M. Rosenthal and F. Shehadi (eds.) *Applied Ethics and Ethical Theory*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1988, 163.
13. F. M. Kamm, "Ethics, Applied Ethics, and Applying Applied Ethics," 164.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
16. J. Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001, 6.
17. R. Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 24.
18. This distinction between theory-driven and problem-driven methods is taken from D. Green and I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994, 6–7.
19. J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, 20.
20. Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001, 6.
21. Having said that, one should also add that Russell himself did not hold his claim about *a priori* philosophical propositions consistently.
22. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, A. Kenny (eds.) *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Volume III: The Correspondence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 40.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
24. See for example Andy Clark, *Microcognition* (MIT Press/Bradford Books 1989); *Asociative Engines* (MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1993); *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again* (MIT Press 1997); and *Mindware: An Introduction To The Philosophy of Cognitive Science* (Oxford University Press, Forthcoming).
25. See E. Mandel, *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, 23–4; J. Reiman, "Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 16, 1987; John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982; John Roemer, *Egalitarian Perspectives: Essays in Philosophical Economics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. For a non-Marxist theory of exploitation, see H. Steiner, "A Liberal Theory of Exploitation," *Ethics*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 1984.
26. See Kay B. Warren, *The Symbolism of Subordination: Indian Identity in a Guatemalan Town*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 1978; Thomas Melville and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: Another Vietnam? Harmondsworth*: Penguin 1971; Michael McClintock, *The American Connection, Vol. II: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala*, London: Zed