

Mark Timmons (ed.)

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This volume initiates a welcome new Oxford Studies series based on the annual meeting of the Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics, organized by Mark Timmons. The back matter indicates that the series is a place where “Leading philosophers present original contributions to our understanding of a wide range of moral issues and positions.” But Timmons himself says more accurately, it seems, that the series aims to provide “some of the best contemporary work in the field of contemporary ethical theory” (p. ix). In what follows I focus on only two of the individual papers; but first I want to make some remarks by way of overview and introduction.

While the papers collected here make a good claim to fulfilling Timmons’s characterization of the central aim of the series, two of the twelve papers fit awkwardly with the previous characterization. Douglas Portmore’s strongly argued contribution, “Consequentialism and Moral Rationalism,” constitutes a proper subset of a chapter in his own recent book, published in the same year as the present volume. Although Portmore carefully mentions this in his book’s Acknowledgements, one can still feel disappointed by something one obviously might expect from a collection of original contributions. It is a bit different with Thomas Hill Jr.’s contribution, “Kantian Constructivism as Normative Ethics.” The original occasion for this paper seems to have been Onora O’Neill’s retirement as President of the British Academy (p. 29, n. 2); but ripped from that specific occasion, Hill’s sustained comparison of O’Neill and Rawls on Kantian constructivism (for Hill’s own positive purposes) feels a bit out of place here.

Nevertheless, the range of topics covered, between those two papers and the papers mentioned below, already illustrates the helpfully broad nature of the collection. The other contributions include: an actual-beliefs account of subjective obligatoriness (Holly M. Smith), a discussion of what it means to treat consenting adults merely as means (Samuel J. Kerstein), a recipe for ‘consequentializing’ any plausible normative theory (Jamie Dreier), an argument for why we might not have to do what is best (S. Andrew Schroeder), a novel account of supererogation (Paul McNamara), a partial solution to the ‘paradox’ of deontology (Ulrike Heuer), a limited defense of pictures as a means of rational moral persuasion (Sarah McGrath), and a defense of a continued appeal to the notion of virtue in moral philosophy (Peter Railton). A discussion of the two remaining contributions will perhaps reveal the general quality of the papers.

In Daniel Star's contribution, "Two Levels of Moral Thinking," Star aims to reconcile three individually plausible but seemingly incompatible claims regarding (1) normal virtuous people and (2) moral philosophers. The first claim expresses the anti-elitist truth that people can be virtuous without the aid of philosophy. The second maintains that virtuous people act non-accidentally for good reasons and that they deliberate on the basis of such reasons. The third maintains that moral philosophers are not wasting their time when they theorize: when, that is, they seek to determine "highly general moral principles" which specify both the good reasons on which virtuous people act and also "a criterion or criteria for determining what it is that people ought to do" (p. 75). If moral philosophy is unnecessary for people to act virtuously, by deliberating and acting upon appropriate reasons, then how can moral philosophy be anything other than a waste of time?

Star answers this question by utilizing a two-level account of reasons that distinguishes between the *derivative* reasons available to normal virtuous people and the *ultimate* reasons discovered by philosophers. On Star's view of what moral philosophers are up to, "ultimate reasons explain derivative reasons, but it is only through first encountering derivative reasons that we are able to discover ultimate reasons" (p. 84). Star also introduces a specific account of reasons – an account he calls *reasons as evidence* – that is meant to support, and to be supported by, the two-level account just mentioned. This is because Star thinks that, "only *reasons as evidence* can explain how it is that the direction of explanation can be the reverse of the direction of discovery" (p. 85). It does so by explaining how someone can know, or anyway be justified in following, derivative reasons, even though she lacks knowledge about ultimate reasons. According to the proposed account, "a fact F is a reason for an agent A to ϕ if and only if F is evidence that A ought to ϕ " (p. 82). So someone *has* a reason to refrain from misleading her husband just in case she *has* evidence that she ought to refrain from doing so. This explains the asymmetry, Star says, because "we can start off being aware of reasons, in virtue of the fact that we start off with evidence concerning what we ought to do, and these reasons, as evidence, come ready to also lead us to deeper knowledge through reflection" (p. 85). It is unclear to me, however, why one needs *reasons as evidence* to explain the asymmetry. It seems that someone can know, or be justified in acting on, a derivative reason even if one sticks with a very generic account of a reason, as a consideration that "counts in favor" of ϕ -ing. Someone's having the relevant justification can be explained by appealing to her having had a good upbringing, on some plausible account (presumably underwritten by moral theory) of what a good upbringing amounts to. The fact that her child is in pain seems to her to count in favor of helping him. Such a reason seems no

less capable of leading someone to deeper knowledge, through reflection, about why such a derivative reason really is a reason. Moral theorists are indeed in the business of articulating the ultimate reasons that explain this; but one need not accept *reasons as evidence* in order to defend such a picture. (This is basically the picture that I defend in “Kantian Reasons for Reasons,” *Ratio* 20 (2007) 264–77.)

The two-level account of reasons also hopes to allow – on Star’s admittedly sketchy (p. 89) account of virtuous individuals – that when such individuals respond to derivative reasons, they are also “in some relevant sense” (p. 88) responding to ultimate reasons. This gets spelled out by saying that when someone *directly* responds to the fact that ϕ -ing would be a case of lying, she also *indirectly* responds to the fact that it would cause pain, “without for a moment taking into account the fact that it would cause pain” (p. 89). So someone can respond indirectly to ultimate reasons without bringing moral theory to mind, because in order to be virtuous “one need not be maximally virtuous” (p. 89). But as far as I can tell, Star provides no justification for maintaining that someone can only be maximally virtuous if she can articulate an account of ultimate reasons. Moreover, the position seems to imply that someone armed with the correct moral theory *thereby* becomes more virtuous than she would be without it. So the position seems after all committed to an implausible version of philosophical elitism.

Multi-level moral thought also makes an appearance in Nick Zangwill’s contribution, “Cordelia’s Bond and Indirect Consequentialism.” The paper takes aim at indirect consequentialism, the view that “the right action is one that accords with rules or motives, which if generally followed would most promote the good” (p. 145). Zangwill’s complaint is that indirect consequentialism cannot do justice to “matters of the heart,” the partialist commitments embodied in commonsense morality. Zangwill says that such matters of the heart “are a stake that we can drive through the heart of consequentialism” (p. 143). Consider for instance Cordelia’s commitment – her ‘bond’ – to her father, Lear. While indirect consequentialism can allow that Cordelia have this partialist bond, the problem is that the theoretical *grounds* for her having that bond seem incompatible with the commonsense grounds. Both Cordelia and commonsense are committed, on Zangwill’s view, to certain conditionals of the form *if B, then M*, where B is Cordelia’s bond to Lear and M is some moral property, such as bearing an obligation (p. 147). Such commonsense conditionals fail to make mention of the typical consequences of a bond like B; and they therefore fail to mention the theoretical right-maker for M, according to indirect consequentialism. Indeed, indirect consequentialism seems committed to considering the conditional false. This is because the commonsense

conditional cites only factors *intrinsic* to the relationship between Cordelia and Lear, whereas the theory cites extrinsic factors as well: the Cordelia-Lear relationship is “just a drop in the ocean of all the father-daughter relationships” (p. 155).

Nor are things made better, Zangwill thinks, by universalizing. Perhaps commonsense morality is committed to claiming that everyone with such a bond bears certain moral properties: perhaps it is committed to the conditional *if* UB *then* UM. Such a conditional still fails to mention consequences (the consequences of UB), so indirect consequentialism must still consider the conditional false. Here again, Zangwill’s position is that the “consequentialist right-maker is at variance with the intuitive intrinsicity” of the right-maker of filial obligations (p. 159). Hence indirect consequentialism is incompatible with a commonsense commitment to matters of the heart. This argument does seem to have something right about it, something that Bernard Williams pressed against R. M. Hare’s consequentialism long ago. But Zangwill takes his paper to be sharpening Williams’s point (p. 164, n. 17), by identifying certain conditionals to which commonsense morality is committed and indirect consequentialism must apparently reject. It is a good question whether anyone not already convinced by Williams’s well-known attacks in this area will conclude that the considerations presented here strike the death blow to consequentialism.

The Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics has been gaining good momentum since its inception, and future installments of this Oxford Studies series will no doubt build on the strength and range of the arguments collected in this helpful inaugural volume.

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