

Andreas Müller, *Constructing Practical Reasons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020
(Forthcoming in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*)

In *Constructing Practical Reasons*, Andreas Müller carefully develops a non-representationalist view of reasoning into a constructivist account of reasons. Throughout, Müller is clear and level-headed, and his book amounts to some of the most thorough work in the constructivist tradition. I highly recommend anyone interested in mind-dependent views of normativity to study it.

Müller begins by defending a theory of reasoning as requiring reason judgments, where reason judgments are not representational yet still truth apt (Chapter 2). He clarifies the nature of these judgments in functionalist terms as guiding reasoning in a certain way (Chapter 3). And he argues that these judgments are not true due to representing reasons, but rather are pragmatically true insofar as they guide *correct* reasoning (Chapter 4). Müller then offers a theory of correct reasoning as that which doesn't violate the constitutive rules governing the activity of reasoning (Chapter 5). He concludes with a discussion of how to capture various senses of objectivity given his mind-dependent conception of reasons (Chapter 6).

A recent strand of constructivism – and, indeed, of other broadly subjectivist views – is to generate normativity from what's constitutive of some important aspect of agency (Korsgaard 2009; cf. Smith 2013). One major challenge for this sort of approach is to develop a plausible theory of that aspect of agency. Another is to use what's constitutive of it to distinguish between *correct* and *incorrect* instances as opposed to simply distinguish between *instances* and *non-instances*.

Müller contributes significantly to the constitutivist project on both fronts. As for addressing the first challenge, he offers a detailed theory of reasoning over the course of two chapters. In fact, these would be independently worthwhile as introductions to the philosophy of reasoning, aside from their meta-ethical interest. As for the second challenge, Müller claims that correct reasoning is determined by the constitutive rules of the activity of reasoning. Crucially, he departs from the likes of Rawls (1955) and Searle (1964) in allowing for violations of those rules to still constitute the relevant activity so long as the person makes the violation in awareness of the rules (168-170). So, Müller argues, someone can be playing chess even when making an illegal move, so long as they make that move in light of an awareness of the legal moves. In terms of reasoning, violations of the constitutive rules of reasoning are still species of reasoning so long as those violations occur in light of an awareness of the rules. Incorrect reasoning, Müller then claims, is reasoning that violates those rules (162).

While this account is a significant attempt to solve the two challenges, I have reservations as to how successfully it deals with them.

As for the theory of reasoning, I remain unconvinced that the best account of reasoning appeals to reason judgments which are truth-apt propositional attitudes that aren't representational. Müller defends this view on the basis of three adequacy conditions for a theory of reasoning: that it allows for bad reasoning, that it distinguishes reasoning from non-reasoning, and that it makes sense of why a person must take their reasoning to be good while they are engaged in it (41-43). Yet, it seems to me a broadly dispositional account of the sort that Müller rejects can accommodate these conditions. While Müller critiques accounts along these lines, like that of John Broome (2013) and

Paul Boghossian (2014), it seems to me that one can take Müller's plausible functional construal of guiding reasoning and simply hold that a complex disposition plays that role. It's not clear why a propositional attitude is particularly well-suited to play that guiding role. By contrast, a dispositional view would avoid the need to posit a truth-apt propositional attitude that is not representational, and hence would avoid the need to appeal to a normative-domain specific pragmatic theory of truth. Overall, then, it would be nice to hear more about the special need in reasoning for a truth-apt but non-representational propositional attitude.

As for constitutive rules, I doubt that Müller's accommodation of violations of constitutive rules of reasoning can account for *incorrect* reasoning. The problem is that allowing for violations to still count as engaging in reasoning just allows what's normally *non-reasoning* to count as *reasoning*. But that is a separate matter than whether such reasoning is *correct* or *incorrect*. Returning to the chess example, say that while playing chess a player moves their rook diagonally even though they are aware that the actual rules of chess prohibit this, but the player does so in order to cheat and put their opponent in checkmate. Müller's account usefully allows that this person is still playing chess as opposed to schmess. But he needs, in addition, that in violating the constitutive rules the player thereby makes a *bad* move. But all allowing for violations does is let what are normally non-moves to be moves. It doesn't make abnormal moves *bad*. Indeed, if we want to allow that cheating moves to still be moves – and not non-moves masquerading as moves – then we have to allow that cheating moves can be *correct* in the relevant sense. Insofar as the purpose of a chess player is to try to win at the game, and violations in awareness of the rules still counts as moves, then such cheating moves can be 'good' in the sense of helping the player to win. In the same manner, violations of the constitutive rules of reasoning that are made with awareness of the rules of reasoning would not automatically be *incorrect* reasoning, but rather would be some activity that is normally non-reasoning but, given awareness of the rules, is in this case an episode of reasoning. But we don't yet have that it is 'bad' reasoning.

Thus, I have criticisms of Müller's view, but I am only able to engage in such criticism because his view is so thoroughly developed.

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