

Shafer-Landau, Russ (ed.). *Oxford Studies in Metaethics Volume 5*.

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Oxford Studies in Metaethics is an annual series collecting new work in the foundations of ethics. As with the other volumes in this series, the papers in Volume 5 range widely across the field, and the quality of the work is extremely high, making this an indispensable resource for anyone with research interests in metaethics. One caveat is in order: *pace* the dust jacket of this volume, this series is not a good place for someone wishing to acquaint themselves with the current state of play in metaethics to *start*; you will find no *Philosophy Compass* style surveys here. Each of the papers in this volume deserves more attention than I can provide in this short review. I am able only to very briefly canvass the papers on offer, before exploring a few of the arguments in slightly greater depth.

One of the notable changes over the past generation of work in metaethics has been the shift from a focus on explicitly moral notions like goodness and rightness to a focus on the more generic normative notion of a reason. In his contribution, Joseph Raz addresses a central question about reasons: what is their relationship to our capacity to reason? A more recent trend in metaethics has been increasing attention to the resources provided by linguistic semantics. Drawing in part on these resources, Stephen Finlay develops a provocative and novel reductive account of the normative. The current zeitgeist in metaethics is also marked by notable 'meta-metaethical' anxiety: worries that the tools or presumptions that characterize metaethical discourse are in some sense misleading or distorting. Simon Blackburn's contribution exemplifies this anxiety, arguing against the use of two central argumentative devices in metaethics: Euthyphro-style priority arguments, and G. E. Moore style 'isolation tests'. Blackburn then argues for the surprising thesis that we can understand the semantic function of 'good' by analogy with deflationist theories of truth according to which the truth predicate is largely a convenient device of generalization.

The expressivist program that Blackburn helped to shape gets a lot of attention in this volume. James Lenman argues that Scanlonian commitments to contractualism and the method of reflective equilibrium are best developed within an expressivist framework. Antti Kauppinen proposes a novel solution to the 'moral attitudes problem': the challenge to state *which* non-belief-like attitude is expressed by moral utterances. Kauppinen proposes a novel *historicist* approach to individuating the moral attitude, according to which (very roughly) that the relevant attitude is (dis-)approval that typically results from an impartial but engaged perspective. Expressivism is often motivated by appeal to the *Humean theory of motivation*: roughly, the thesis that motivation is only possible in virtue of a desire-like state that is in some

sense independent of any belief the agent might have. Melissa Barry explores three versions of the independence idea, and argues that none of these versions permits the Humean to offer a satisfactory account of rational action.

It appears plausible that metaethical attention should be addressed to values, reasons, etc. that are in some sense fundamental. Julie Tannenbaum helps us to see that this thought requires considerable sharpening, as she distinguishes a host of interestingly different types of distinctions between goods, raising the question of which sorts of priority our attention ought to be drawn to.

In the sole contribution to the volume dedicated to the metaphysics of ethics, Jussi Suikkanen defends non-naturalistic realism against Frank Jackson's charge that commitment to the supervenience of the ethical rules out property dualism. Suikkanen argues that Jackson's necessary coextension account of property identity is only compelling on a controversial nominalist view of properties.

I will discuss the remaining three papers in the volume in slightly more depth, beginning with Mark Schroeder's impressive discussion of the distinction between the 'right' and 'wrong' kinds of reason. This distinction is easily illustrated: having excellent evidence for a proposition is the right kind of reason to believe it, while my paying you a million dollars to believe it is the wrong kind of reason to believe it. However, explaining what the distinction consists in has proven difficult. Schroeder begins by noting that the scope of the problem is very broad: there are right kinds of reasons to laugh at a joke, and to play a certain move in chess, as well as to form a belief. He argues that it is plausible that all of these cases are going to share a deep explanatory structure (32-36), and defends an original solution to the problem in this general form.

Schroeder notes that the right kind of reasons arise with respect to activities. He proposes that the right kind of reasons with respect to any activity *A* are: "...all and only those reasons which are shared by necessarily every able person engaging in *A* because they are engaged in *A*, together with all reasons derivative from such reasons" (39). Consider an example: to play chess is, inter alia, to be attempting to win according to the rules of chess. This explains why, if Bxh7+ forces checkmate, a chess player has the right kind of reason to play it. Everyone who plays chess necessarily has the goal of winning in accordance with the rules, and playing Bxh7+ promotes that goal. By contrast, everyone who plays chess does not necessarily have reason to make an easy million simply because they are engaged in the activity, so someone's offering me a million to play Bxh7+ gives me the wrong kind of reason to play it.

Schroeder's proposal is elegant. However, I worry that it may at best provide a necessary condition for being the right kind of reason. First, some philosophers argue that one only has epistemic reasons to

respond in certain ways to one's evidence, and not, e.g., to collect evidence. This might suggest the following added constraint: one can only have the right kind of reason, relative to an activity, to perform actions that are constituent *parts* of the activities.

A pair of cases brings out a second worry that is more difficult to accommodate. If you know that your opponent plays poorly vs. the Sicilian defense, you seemingly have the right kind of reason to play the Sicilian: doing so promotes the constitutive goal of winning. However, suppose next that your opponent has a well-known phobia of the Bxf7+ sacrifice. Merely to play it (even if it is obviously unsound) is to create in him a desperate panic that will cause his immediate resignation. If this sacrifice is an objectively losing move, one does not have the right kind of reason to play it, despite the fact that doing so promotes the constitutive goal shared by all chess players. I think that the explanation of this case may be that some activities have conventions (e.g. of chess-etiquette) that function, in effect, to distinguish right from wrong kinds of reasons, *among the reasons shared by all participants in the activity*. If this is right, Schroeder's attractive thought that the structure of the wrong kind of reasons problem will be general may turn out to fail. We may rather need to fill in added constraints that are local to specific activities.

Can plausible normative ethical principles constrain our metaethical theorizing? David Enoch argues that they can. Enoch focuses on a principle he calls Impartiality: certain other things being equal, in cases of conflict in preferences, we should step back from our preferences, and apply an impartial solution. Enoch argues that Impartiality creates an explanatory burden for a range of antirealist metaethical theories (115).

To illustrate Enoch's idea, suppose that we are going to the movies together, and need to decide whether to go left or right. Suppose further that I am accommodating: if you insist (even on morally objectionable grounds), I will ungrudgingly go along. Now consider two subcases:

- (a) We agree on all of the facts, but I prefer the movie to the left and you prefer the movie to the right.
- (b) We agree on what movie to go to, but I reasonably but incorrectly believe it is playing to the left, while you know that it is playing to the right.

Enoch claims that in cases like (a), Impartiality demands that you ought to agree to an impartial solution (such as coin-flipping). By contrast, cases of disagreements concerning objective facts, like (b), do not generate the same pressure to go impartial (117). This claim faces an initial difficulty: it also seems objectionable in (b) to railroad me into going right. Daniel Greco (personal communication) suggests a helpful solution to this problem on Enoch's behalf: the objection to railroading in (b) is not a failure of impartiality, but rather an objection to a kind of paternalism. Enoch suggests that we intuitively ought to treat cases of serious ethical disagreement like (b) and not like (a). If correct, this puts immediate dialectical

pressure on a crude subjectivist view that takes moral judgments to simply report trivial preferences like those at issue in (a). Enoch wants more, however: he claims that this argument raises problems for expressivism and reductive response-dependent theories quite generally.

Should we accept this latter claim? At first blush, the response-dependence theorist might seem fine, provided that she is able to distinguish the responses that play the constitutive role in her theory from mere preferences. Enoch, however, says that this reply comes with a cost: the objectivist has an explanation for her contrast, while the response-dependence theorist is simply forced to stipulate it (130). This, I think, misunderstands the dialectical situation. Independently of Enoch's objection, a reductive response-dependent theory of normativity will only be plausible insofar as we intuitively take the relevant responses to be plausible normative fact-makers. Suppose, for example, the proposal to reduce the valuable to *the object of a desired desire*. If this theory is not independently plausible, then it is a non-starter, and Enoch's objection is moot. So: suppose (implausibly!) that it is independently plausible: that we think that this just might capture what it is to be valuable. Insofar as this is true, we will necessarily take there to be a strikingly morally significant contrast between desired desires and mere preferences. The former, after all, constitute objective facts about value. This, it seems to me, is *prima facie* enough to underwrite an explanation of the contrast between our treatment of these states and our treatment of mere preferences. It thus seems to me that, at least against the response-dependence theorist, Enoch's argument is dialectically inert: it will have force only insofar as response-dependence is independently implausible.

The final paper I will discuss is James Dreier's defense of Allan Gibbard's norm-expressivism against a recent argument due to Ralph Wedgwood. On Gibbard's view (simplified greatly), to make a normative judgment about what S ought to do is to adopt a contingency plan for what to do in S's shoes. For example, to judge that Julius Caesar ought not to have crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE is to plan, for the contingency of being in Caesar's shoes, not to cross the Rubicon (156). Wedgwood claims that Gibbard's view faces a problem: inconsistent judgments about what to do are obviously objectionable, no matter their content. But it is hard to see what could possibly be objectionable about having inconsistent contingency plans for a circumstance (such as Caesar's) that one knows one could never be in. (It may help to compare the unobjectionable state of having inconsistent sets of daydreams.) Wedgwood concludes that, *contra* expressivism, we need to take normative judgments to be governed by the aim of making true claims, in order to explain the constitutive objectionability of inconsistent normative judgments.

Dreier responds by distinguishing two ways that rules can be related to norms. A rule can be justified as a good way to follow the norm (for example, strategic principles in chess), or it can be justified

as partially constitutive of what it is to follow the norm at all (for example, the rules of chess). The latter rules are not justified in virtue of being good ways of achieving success at chess. Rather, following them is just what makes one count as a chess player (164). Dreier's conjecture is that semantic norms like the consistency norm mentioned above are constitutive norms of discourse, and hence do not need to be explained by appeal to some independent norm of truth.

Dreier recognizes that this response appears to leave an uncomfortable residue: there seems to be a non-accidentally close link between these norms and truth-preservation. This might in turn seem to beg for an explanation of the sort that Wedgwood suggests. Dreier notes, however, that expressivists already find themselves under independent pressure to adopt a deflationary theory of truth (cf. also Blackburn in the same volume). If truth is merely a device of generalization, then the close link between the constitutive norms and truth can be explained without any pressure to explain the norms in terms of an explanatorily prior goal of aiming at the truth (169-72).

This is a beautiful riposte, but I worry that its force is largely illusory. Dreier says that he agrees with Wedgwood that belief has truth as its correctness-condition (160). But we can paraphrase away the word 'truth' here without loss, and simply say: a belief that p is correct iff p . We notice that all of the constitutive norms for our discourse are intimately connected to this norm. Is it a mere accident of our linguistic conventions that the constitutive norms that fix the content of *correct* here have this implication? We can assess this by considering whether we could introduce a connective like A. N. Prior's notorious *tonk* into our language. If we could do this, we would have a language in which a belief that p counted as correct even if not- p . It seems to me that we could not do this. And the reason is simply that the constitutive norms for the correctness of belief are norms for the correctness of a representational state. That is, belief is a relation with the constitutive character that one has that state relative to p correctly just in case p . Since expressivists think that ought-judgments do not express representational states of this kind, it appears to be a kind of fetish on the expressivist account to insist that the norms for ought-judgments must have a constitutive structure identical to that of norms for a representational state. Could the expressivist's deflationism extend to undercut this explanatory contrast? For reasons related to ones Dreier himself has discussed elsewhere, I think not: a deflationism that undercut any ability to characterize an explanatorily significant difference between normative judgments and ordinary factual beliefs would erase our ability to state the thesis of expressivism. If this is right, deflationism will be no help in addressing the residual force of Wedgwood's argument.

These three papers are representative of the whole of this volume: sharply argued, cutting edge discussions of central issues in metaethics that anyone antecedently interested in the field will be unable to resist sinking her teeth into.

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