Editorial

A. W. Musschenga · R. Heeger

Published online: 5 April 2011
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

The first four papers of this issue result from the 2009 Annual Conference of the British Society for Ethical Theory, held in Reading, UK. Guest editor for this part is Bart Streumer of the University of Reading.

Leonard Kahn opens the issue with a paper on Allan Gibbard's version of the Reactive Attitude account of moral blameworthiness. Gibbard's version faces what has come to be known as the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem, which manifests itself in circumstances in which there are reasons to have pro-attitudes toward X even though X intuitively has no value. Kahn considers some ways in which Gibbard might attempt to avoid the problem and finds that all of these ways fail to achieve their aim. At the end of the paper Kahn presents his own version of the Reactive Attitude account of moral blameworthiness and shows that it simply avoids the Wrong Kind of Reason Problem rather than attempting to solve the problem on a piecemeal basis.

The second paper, by James Lenman, examines the relation between pleasure and desire. Some authors have identified enjoying some experience with desiring it to be prolonged further. Lenman finds this kind of reductionist psychological hedonism false as the range of objects of desire is just too rich to accommodate it. But he does think that reductionist views are onto something. There is a certain stability and coherence to our responses and attitudes and this stability and coherence plays a crucial role in our very understanding of what they are. For the most part, but not always, liking and wanting are intimately linked: we tend to like the things we want and want the things we like. And when we want the things we like and enjoy we tend to want them in part at least because we like or enjoy them. Wholly disconnected from its links with desire, pleasure seems barely intelligible. Whole disconnected from its links with pleasure, desire seems too bloodless.

Alan Thomas' paper continues the discussion on particularism. His version of particularism explains why one ought not to accept the principled 'holism' that has proved to be a problem for Dancy's form of particularism. Thomas states that non-monotonicity of a wide range of moral reasoning is the basis of a case for particularism. Non-monotonicity threatens practical decision with an overwhelming

A. W. Musschenga (✉) · R. Heeger
Department of Philosophy, VU University, De Boelelaan 1105, Amsterdam 1081 HV, The Netherlands
e-mail: a.w.musschenga@vu.nl

informational complexity to which a form of ethical generalism seems the best response. Ethics certainly involves hedged principles. However, principles cannot be self-hedging. Practical reasoning is concluded by the categorical detachment of the action-as-conclusion itself.

In the last contribution to the BSET-part of the issue, Samantha Vice discusses cynicism. She starts with the observation that our attitude towards cynicism is ambivalent: On the one hand we condemn it as a character failing and a trend that is undermining political and social life; on the other hand, we are often impressed by the apparent realism and honesty of the cynic. Vice's aim in her paper is to offer an account of cynicism that can explain both our attraction and aversion. After defending a particular conception of cynicism, she argues that most of the work in explaining the fault of cynicism can be done by referring not to the cynic's *beliefs* about humanity, but to the *attitude* cultivated as a response to that belief. This attitude is hostile to the virtues of faith, hope and charity, upon which relationships and our sense of moral community depend. In conclusion, she suggests that holding the cynical belief is itself immoral, and that cynicism is disrespectful and destructive of morality.

Alexander Brown's paper goes into the problem of the slavery of the talented that troubles resource egalitarians such as Ronald Dworkin. This problem occurs when an attempt to mitigate the influence of unequal talents on the distribution of income suggests enslaving the talented so that their talents can be put to work for the not so talented. In order to avoid the slavery of the talented Dworkin argues that talents should not be included in an initial auction for worldly resources. For the same reason he thinks that hypothetical insurance premiums against lack of talent should not be based on potential earnings but fixed as an increasing proportion of actual income. However, when it comes to insurance payouts the proposal is to tie coverage to potential earnings rather than actual income. The consequence of these tough rules on payouts is that the not so talented face restricted occupational choices. Brown tries to show how this consequence can be avoided once a more complete inventory of the possible motivations of parties to the hypothetical insurance scenario has been taken. Finally, he tries to work through the implications of this argument for debates in political theory and welfare policy.

Thomas Porter's paper discusses a problem that has recently been raised by Ingmar Persson for prioritarianism, a view according to which a given benefit, such as a unit of utility, has greater moral value to the extent that its recipient is worse off. Porter focuses on absolute prioritarianism, which understands 'worse off' in absolute terms, so that a given increase in a person's utility has the same moral value regardless of how well off anyone else is. One implication of this is that when some individuals are worse off and some individuals are better off, it is morally more valuable, all other things equal, to distribute a given benefit to those who are worse off. Ingmar Persson's argument is that the Levelling Down Objection could be worse for prioritarianism than for egalitarians. His argument depends on the claim that indifference to changes in the average prioritarian value of benefits implies indifference to changes in the overall prioritarian value of a state of affairs. Porter tries to show that sensible versions of prioritarianism have no such implication.

Political liberals, following Rawls, believe that justice should be 'political' rather than 'metaphysical.' The reason for this is to ensure that the state's coercion be justified to citizens in terms that meet political liberalism's principle of legitimacy. Ryan W. Davis suggests in his paper that privileging a political conception of justice involves costs, such as forgoing the opportunity for political theory to learn from other areas of philosophy. He argues that it is not clear that such privileging provides any benefit in return. Whether a political conception of justice more adequately satisfies the liberal principle of legitimacy than a metaphysical conception of justice is an open question. To show this, Davis

describes three ways in which political conceptions of justice have been developed within the literature. He then argues that while each might be helpful in finding reasons that reasonable citizens can accept, all face challenges in satisfying the liberal principle of legitimacy. Political conceptions of justice confront the same set of justificatory problems as 'metaphysical' conceptions. Davis finds that the question of whether a political conception is preferable should receive greater scrutiny.

In the last contribution of this issue Wim Dubbink & Jeffery Smith discuss whether corporations should be conceived as entities to which moral responsibility can be attributed. They present what they call a *political* account of corporate moral responsibility. They argue that in modern, liberal democratic societies, there is an underlying political need to attribute greater levels of moral responsibility to corporations. Corporate moral responsibility is essential to the maintenance of social coordination that both advances social welfare and protects citizens' moral entitlements. This political account posits a special capacity of self-governance that corporations can intelligibly be said to possess. Corporations can be said to be 'administrators of duty' in that they can voluntarily incorporate moral principles into their decision-making processes about how to conduct business. Dubbink & Smith contend that this account supplements and partly transforms earlier pragmatic accounts of corporate moral responsibility by disentangling responsibility from its conventional linkages with accountability, blame and punishment. In their view it thereby represents a distinctive way to defend corporate moral responsibility and shows how Kantian thought can be helpful in clarifying the concept.

Amsterdam/Utrecht, April 2011