

## Editorial

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In our Editorial Note published in December 2017 (Vol. 20, Issue 5), we reflected critically on current professional tendencies in moral philosophy. Our main aim was to explore the link between these developments and assessment criteria for successful publications in our field.

We received a variety of reactions to this piece, not all of them sympathetic, so we thought it would be advisable to expand on this topic here. At the same time, we offered the opportunity to members of the Editorial Board and the Associate Editors to share their views as well – we are grateful that Christoph Lumer and Simon Kirchin were willing to write a contribution.

To clarify, our first Editorial Note was not meant to announce changes in the publishing policy of the journal. We do intend, however, as mentioned there, to shift the focus of editorials in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. In particular, we would like to use these notes to intervene in current debates and to kick-start discussions. Editorials, to our mind, are a place to air subjective and perhaps even somewhat provocative contributions.

We therefore intentionally wrote in a quite direct and polemical style. We are sorry that this was perceived as offensive by some of our readers. We sincerely regret this outcome. It was certainly not our intention. Neither did we intend to disrespect such an eminent scholar as Derek Parfit. His name was used merely to illustrate the problem of philosophical categories advanced by important philosophers becoming all-too entrenched.

We would like to address four topics: First, a broader agenda for practical philosophy; second, pluralism of theoretical approaches and traditions; third, the role of moral philosophy in society and, finally, what this means for our journal:

- 1) We regard professional self-reflection as crucial for ethical debates. In other words, we think that dealing openly with disagreement and dissent is an important virtue of doing moral philosophy. It is our impression that debates tend to become encapsulated in separate niches of scholarship. Perhaps this is to some extent inevitable in any discourse

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characterized by a high level of specialisation. Yet, we must continue to encourage critical and fruitful dialogue among different branches of practical philosophy. This requires conditions where scholars can acknowledge a broad range of discussions in our field and that they are willing to engage with each other critically and constructively and, if need be, polemically as well. In short, there must be incentives to leave one's comfort zone. And so we have been wondering to what extent current publication procedures and expectations, perceived or real, are best suited to encouraging such a dialogue. Emphatically, this point is about our intention to facilitate joint discussion in practical philosophy at large. It is certainly not meant to question the worth or discourage the production of sophisticated scholarly papers on highly specialised topics.

- 2) We are adamant supporters of a pluralistic attitude within moral philosophy. At the same time, this credo is not meant to imply any degree of relativism as regards scholarly rigour. We believe it is only possible to assess the cogency of specific theories and their potential contribution to an improved understanding of ethics if all relevant arguments are articulated in their strongest versions. Philosophical excellence can be found in various styles and various traditions. It is not a prerogative of so-called analytic or continental philosophy. Great work is often produced via a rediscovery of older philosophical traditions. Nor is excellence a privilege of European or Western philosophy, of course. More specifically, we are concerned that theories of currently highly influential philosophers, such as Rawls or Parfit, are seen by some as authoritative and that, in consequence, only few contest their foundations. This can impose undesirable constraints on philosophical discourse. Certainly, moral philosophy needs scholarly engagement with such contemporary authors, and likewise with great philosophers of the past, such as Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant or Nietzsche. But we are concerned that certain taxonomies, theoretical distinctions, and methodological points of departure could come to dominate a discourse instead of themselves becoming the object of critical scrutiny. Such developments are at least partly intensified in a context of competition for space in academic journals, where successful papers need to show a high level of acquaintance with dominant theories.
- 3) Ultimately, ethical theorizing must also aim to enhance our understanding of moral practices. No doubt, this requires philosophical sophistication, theoretical rigour and the deployment of some technical apparatus. But at the same time, this objective presupposes an awareness of the limitations of philosophical theorizing. If, furthermore, one also aims to intervene in concrete, morally relevant practices ethics then this requires an appreciation of the extent to which philosophical methodology can benefit from interdisciplinary cooperation. It is here that we have the most specific concerns about the state of the current discourse. It is our view that research in empirical disciplines all too often ignores crucial philosophical distinctions and theories. We also feel that some research in applied ethics has been developed too independently from more theoretical debates. Conversely, many otherwise technically rigorous and sophisticated contributions to moral philosophy are unconnected to debates about real life issues. These developments pose a challenge, we think. Certainly, no simple solutions and quick fixes are available since, as we have just noted, specialisation is unavoidable. Still, in addition to several interdisciplinary research programmes specifically aimed at bridging these gaps, current ethical discourse can help by promoting certain formats and publication strategies. This is not simply a matter of "empirically informed ethics". It concerns, in a more fundamental sense, the role of ethics as a normative discipline within academia. We therefore see it as a key task for moral philosophy to reflect critically on philosophers' role in academic discourses at large.

- 4) While these considerations pertain to ethical discourse in general, we want to briefly address how we see the place of *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* in all this. We think that this journal is particularly well positioned to respond to the challenges mentioned above. It is an international journal, based in Europe. It is a venue for a broad range of theoretical traditions and it explicitly focuses on the relationship between ethical theory *and* moral practice. The editorial team of the journal is open to a variety of philosophical traditions, acutely aware of the link to concrete practices, and demanding in terms of quality. The procedures of the journal serve to maintain independent quality control. All submissions are assessed by at least one Editor-in-Chief and one of our four Associate Editors. The Editor-in-Chief and the Associate Editor decide jointly whether the paper should be sent out to reviewers. The Associate Editors are responsible for the selection of reviewers and prepare the final decision which then needs to be confirmed by one of the Editors-in-Chief. All matters of general policy are decided together. The Editorial Board is an important resource for identifying reviewers and at the same time functions as an advisory board. These procedures are time-consuming, but sharing these responsibilities is the only way to guarantee the openness and outstanding quality this journal stands for.

These are of course merely short reflections on the state of contemporary discourse in moral philosophy from our point of view. We would be keen to learn where colleagues disagree with us and how we can best improve the quality of ethical discourse together. We would be glad if our journal could facilitate discussions on this topic.