

Editorial

Albert W. Musschenga · Robert Heeger

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Critics maintain that agent-based theories such as the one Michael Slote defends in *Morals From Motives*: (i) violate the deontic axiom that “ought” implies “can”, (ii) cannot allow for a person’s doing the right thing for the wrong reason, and (iii) do not yield clear verdicts in a number of cases involving “conflicting motives” and “motivational over-determination”. In the first article of this issue Daniel Doviak develops a new agent-based theory of right action designed to avoid the problems presented for Slote’s view. Doviak’s alternative view makes morally right action a matter of expressing an optimal balance of virtue over vice and hence commands agents in each situation to improve their degree of excellence to the greatest extent possible. Doviak thereby assumes a fairly neutral account of virtues and vices which are defined by direct appeal to aretaic properties like excellence (or admirability) and deficiency (or deplorability), respectively.

In the second article, Scott Hill develops a theological account of intrinsic value based on Robert Merrihew Adams’ *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Adams’ theory departs from the traditional view in that (i) intrinsic is relational, (ii) only intrinsic goodness is, and (iii) the extrinsic value of an object can alter that object’s intrinsic value. Hills argues why Adams’ theory of intrinsic value is interesting, situates his theory within the broader literature on intrinsic value, and draws attention to some of its revisionist features. Next he states the theory, raises some problems for it, and refines it in light of those problems. Then he illustrates how the refined theory works by showing that it has the resources to deal with some seemingly formidable objections.

In her article, Amy Mullin explores what makes children worthy of moral consideration, by looking to the way children, especially children with severe intellectual disabilities have functioned in what Jan Narveson has dubbed the ‘argument from marginal cases’. She discusses the main approaches to the moral consideration of children which agree that the potential of children is morally considerable, but disagree as to whether and why children with intellectual disabilities are morally considerable. These approaches explore the moral significance of intellectual capacities, species membership, the capacity for welfare, and the interests of others. Mullin argues that relationships characterized by reciprocity of care are

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

morally valuable, that both the potential to be in such relationships and the actuality of being in them are morally valuable, and that many children with significant intellectual disabilities have this potential.

Derek Parfit maintains that in contrast to egalitarianism, prioritarianism—the view that it is morally more important to benefit the people who are worse off—escapes the levelling down objection. In opposition to Parfit, Ingmar Persson has argued in this journal (2008) that prioritarianism is also vulnerable to the levelling down objection – and, indeed, to related, more serious objections which egalitarianism avoids. His argument is based upon a claim that he has argued for in a previous article published in this journal (2001). The argument holds that, like egalitarianism, prioritarianism is committed to the existence of an impersonal value, a value which is not a value *for* somebody. Prioritarianism is committed to this value because it claims that bestowing a benefit upon somebody who is worse off rather than upon somebody better off makes the outcome (morally) better. But this outcome is not better *for* somebody (the worse-off) than the other outcome would be for someone else (the better-off), since the benefit, being the same, is as good for one as for the other. In his contribution to this issue, Persson goes into objections to his view, from, a.o., Thomas Porter (this journal, 2010).

Most people's careers involve a great deal of subservient activity that would prevent the kind of control over agents' actions that autonomy would seem to require. Yet, it would, according to James Rocha, seem strange to deny autonomy to every agent who regularly follows orders at work—to do so would make autonomy a futile ideal. In his article, Rocha states that most contemporary autonomy accounts fail to distinguish agents who sufficiently control their lives, in spite of limited subservience, according to their own standards, from agents for whom subservience precludes a fulfilling life. Rocha suggests that the solution lies in a return to goal-oriented autonomy accounts, which can use the goal to distinguish when subservience overwhelms autonomy from when subservience and autonomy can coexist. He presents an account that anchors autonomy in the happiness that it provides for agents who sufficiently control their lives as determined by their more important prudential standards. On this account, agents in subservient careers can be autonomous if they determine how to make their careers consistent with their happiness.

In the last article, J. David Velleman and Herlinde Pauer-Studer discuss some implications of the Holocaust for moral philosophy. With Hannah Arendt, they ask how someone like Adolf Eichmann who claimed to be following the Categorical Imperative, and who seemed to understand it, nevertheless has become a leading perpetrator of monstrous crimes. More generally, how could ordinary people participate in those crimes when they had been brought up under the assumption, as Arendt states, that morality explains itself. The explanation Velleman and Pauer-Studer offer is that these perpetrators mischaracterized their situations and consequently misinterpreted and misapplied the guidelines of their conventional morality. Even if fundamental principles remain intact in their abstract form, there can still be a moral inversion such as Arendt describes. Abstract principles must be given a socially relevant interpretation, and they must then be applied by agents with socially inculcated habits of moral perception. It was at these stages that things went wrong in the Third Reich. Velleman and Pauer-Studer explore this thesis in application to several front-line perpetrators who maintained false moral self-conceptions. They conclude that more than abstract moral reasoning is required to correct such distortions.