



## Editorial 5/2018

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“The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.” – wrote Sellars in a justly famous, but hopefully still not overused quote. If he is right, and I tend to think he is, then finding a few common threads among the articles of this issue – seeing how they hang together in the broadest possible sense – is itself a task of philosophical interest. I will propose one way of grouping the papers below, fervently hoping that I do not thereby misrepresent or encroach upon the authors’ original intentions. In any case, alternative ways of connecting dots will of course also be possible, not the least because this instalment of our journal contains within it a special issue devoted to outstanding papers presented at the 2018 conference of the *British Society for Ethical Theory* in Sheffield.

One common thread is surely the concern with reasons in normative moral theory as well as metaethics. Several papers deal with this topic from an exciting variety of angles. Peter Shiu-Hwa Tsu’s *Reason Holism, Individuation, and Embeddedness*, for example, defends the “embedded thesis” as a general constraint on how moral reasons function, and contrasts this thesis with Dancy’s reason holism. Tsu argues that (*pace* Dancy) the feature that serves as a moral reason in a context cannot be individuated independently from the context within which it is embedded on pain of losing its status as a reason. In a similarly abstract treatment of reasons, Benjamin Wald in his *A New Defense of the Motive of Duty Thesis* revisits the “Motive of Duty Thesis” and connects its defense to the so-called “Guise of the Good” view. By forging such a link, he claims, we can show that an action can only have moral worth if it is at least partly motivated by a normative assessment of the action.

Still on the topic of reasons, but at a somewhat more concrete level Danielle Zwarthoed’s *Autonomy-Based Reasons for Limitarianism* discusses autonomy-based justifications of limitarianism. It may well be the case that having less rather than more enhances your autonomy. If so, could that be a reason for embracing limitarianism? Gideon Elford in his *When is Inequality Fair?* shows us how to connect an abstract debate about reasons, namely the burgeoning discussion concerning the wrong kind of reasons problem, to a current

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problem of political philosophy, which is to distinguish between unfair and defensible inequalities. Asheel Singh's *The Hypothetical Consent Objection to Anti-Natalism* also fits to some extent in this series of papers concerned with reasons. After all, the question in this piece is whether appeals to hypothetical consent can provide justificatory reasons, and more specifically, whether procreators can appeal to hypothetical consent to justify exposing children to the harms of existence. Singh answers in the negative and goes on to propose an alternative route for such justification. Finally, and at a yet more tangible level of discussion, Ornaith O'Dowd offers a Kantian explanation of the moral significance of microaggressions. The latter are more or less minor and more or less deliberate incidents in which someone is disrespected in connection with their oppressed social identity. In *Microaggressions: A Kantian Account*, O'Dowd presents reasons for action relevant not only to how perpetrators of microaggressions should act, but also to the wider social context beyond face-to-face interactions.

Another thread linking a number of contributions to this issue is the theme of moral understanding and the nature of moral cognition. Thus, Graham Bex-Priestley's *Error and the Limits of Quasi-Realism* discusses the possibility of moral error arguing that if moral expressivism is true it would be wrong to attribute fundamental moral mistakes to anyone. However, contrary to some other contributors to the debate, he takes a rather sanguine view of this implication of expressivism: expressivists can still interpret, make sense of, and vindicate ordinary moral discourse, he holds. The paper entitled *Sentimentalism about Moral Understanding* is sure to appeal to much the same audience as Bex-Priestley's work. In the latter piece, Nathan Robert Howard questions a widely-shared assumption, namely that moral understanding is a cognitive state. He sets out a number of grounds why we should allow for the possibility that moral understanding is at least partially non-cognitive and outlines a non-cognitivist account of moral understanding. Still in the same area of interest, we also have François Jaquet's *Evolution and Utilitarianism* contributing to the currently trending debate regarding the debunking of moral beliefs based on appeals to evolutionary theory. Seeking to improve on former anti-debunking approaches, Jaquet proposes to combine an objectivist view in metaethics with a subjectivist account of well-being. The hope for such a hybrid account is that it can stand up to debunking challenges from evolutionary theory. Moving another step closer to empirical issues, Daniella Colombo's *Doing, Allowing, Gains, and Losses* suggests what she thinks is a more viable alternative to Kahneman and Tversky's account of preference reversal due to framing effects. She hypothesizes that shifts in the baseline alter agents' perception of the same action as "doing harm" rather than "allowing harm to occur", and that people are risk-seeking when it comes to avoidance of causing extra deaths, and risk-averse when it comes to the prevention of more deaths by means of allowing other deaths to occur as a side effect.

The notion of moral understanding plays an important role in Matej Cibik's *Expectations and Obligations* as well. However, the field here is normative ethics rather than metaethics. Cibik argues that expectations are an important source of obligations arising in our personal relationships. However, these obligations are not so much rooted in role-based duties, on the one hand, or explicit promises or commitments, on the other, but rather in a shared understanding of those relationships and concomitant expectations of the participants in those relationships. Two other papers in normative ethics discuss questions of permissibility and moral requirements but are linked less closely to the themes mentioned above. Linda Eggert's *Harming the Beneficiaries of Humanitarian Intervention* challenges a fairly popular way of justifying the imposition of risks of collateral harm on prospective beneficiaries of armed

humanitarian interventions. This argument called the “beneficiary principle” holds that the side effect of harming non-labile individuals in just armed humanitarian interventions may become less objectionable due to the fact that these individuals can expect to benefit from the intervention. Rejecting the beneficiary principle, Eggert defends the view that beneficiaries are not distinguished from other non-labile individuals in such a way as to permit exposing them to greater risks of being harmed. And last but not at all least, Michael Cholbi’s *The Duty to Work* makes a case that more often than not there is no such thing. That is, despite the intuitive appeal of a reciprocity-based or fair play justification of the duty to work, few individuals in advanced industrialized societies actually incur a duty to work.

Some of you perhaps will be comforted by this argument during the holiday season, some of you may relish the thought of returning to work in 2019 even less. In any case, we hope that perusing this issue (and don’t forget our great reviews either!) will be pure fun for you, and not seen as work at all. We wish you all the best for the festivities, and look forward to welcoming you back in the new year.

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