



ETMP BSET 2018 Editorial

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This issue includes six papers presented at the 2018 British Society of Ethical Theory annual conference, which took place in July at the University of Sheffield. The papers were selected from a large, and very competitive, field of submissions. The conference is the leading forum for ethical theory in the UK calendar, and encompasses practical ethics, normative ethical theory, metaethics, moral psychology, the history of ethics, and ethical questions in the critical philosophy of race, gender, and disability. Much of the breadth of this remit is reflected in the papers collected here.

Graham Bex-Priestley, in his paper, considers whether expressivists can give an adequate account of moral error. If our moral judgements are motivational desire-like states, rather than belief-like states which aim to represent reality, how can moral judgements be *mistaken*? And how are we to make sense of moral *doubt*? Bex-Priestley argues that the quasi-realist treatment of these issues fails. Nonetheless, the expressivist can interpret, make sense of, and vindicate ordinary moral discourse. He argues that on a stability-focused account of moral truth, expressivism furnishes us with tools to respond to the moral sceptic, and is consequently left looking stronger, not weaker.

Matej Cibik, in his contribution, explores the long-neglected topic of expectations in our ethical lives. He argues that expectations are amongst the main generators of moral obligations. Rather than focusing exclusively on general roles – as friends, partners, family members – and on explicit promises or declarations, we must attend to the implicit understandings and expectations which develop within specific relationships in order to identify some of our most important obligations.

Camilla Colombo, in her paper, examines the relationship between two distinctions: the doing/allowing harm distinction, and the loss/no gain distinction. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky argued that many of our decisions are influenced by framing effects – how the available options are described. In cases such as the ‘Asian Flu’ scenario, they argue that different descriptions of one and the same choice-set prompt decision-makers to classify options either in terms of potential gain, or alternatively in terms of potential loss. Colombo argues that the different descriptions may likewise prompt decision-makers to classify options in terms of doing harm, or alternatively in terms of merely allowing harm to occur. The different attitudes to risk displayed by the subjects in Kahneman and Tversky’s example could depend on the fact that people have different moral

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intuitions over the permissibility of doing harm and allowing the same harm to occur. Colombo argues that the fact that both the doing/allowing distinction and the loss/no gain distinction are sensitive to framing effects, and induce similar risk attitudes, does not by itself exclude the autonomy and independent significance of the former.

Linda Eggert, in her paper, focuses on the morality of armed humanitarian intervention. Specifically, she challenges an argument which aims to justify transferring risks of harm in such interventions from intervening combatants to civilians. The argument is grounded in a 'Beneficiary Principle', which holds that being a potential beneficiary of armed intervention may serve to temper one's immunity to risk of harm. Eggert argues that beneficiary status is void, morally speaking, when the benefits consist in the mitigation or prevention of wrongful harms. The conditions in which beneficiary status may affect the permissibility of imposing risks of harm are thus more limited than ordinarily thought.

Nathan Howard, in his contribution, offers a distinctive account of moral understanding. It is commonly assumed – for example, in debates about moral testimony – that moral understanding is a cognitive state. Howard, however, suggests that a non-cognitive conception of moral understanding is plausible and serves to enlighten such debates. Since moral worth requires moral understanding and also requires being in a suitable non-cognitive state, identifying moral understanding with the correct non-cognitive state seems an appealingly parsimonious option. Furthermore, the view fits well with the observation that non-cognitive states are not generally acquired through testimony.

Peter Shiu-Hwa Tsu, in the final paper of the collection, focuses on how to individuate reasons, and on the important implications of how we do so. Tsu targets Jonathan Dancy's reasons holism, the view that a feature which is a reason for some response in one context may not be a reason for that response in some different context (and may even disfavour the response). It is the presence of what Dancy calls enablers and disablers (which are distinct from the reason itself) which explains whether some feature counts as a reason in some context. This presupposes that features that function as reasons can indeed be individuated from those that function as enablers. Tsu argues, however, that a feature that serves as a reason in some context cannot be individuated independently of the context in which it is embedded – and consequently from its enablers – while still maintaining its status as a reason. Establishing this 'embedded thesis' would serve to undermine reason holism, and serve as a general constraint on how reasons behave.

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