Editorial

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This issue of *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* brings together a refereed selection of five papers that were presented at the 2019 annual meeting of the British Society for Ethical Theory (BSET) (<https://www.bset.org.uk>), hosted by the University of Glasgow. BSET conceives of ethical theory very broadly and inclusively, and this is reflected in the essays published here: Some of the contributions lie at the intersection of ethics with philosophy of language, epistemology or feminist philosophy, while others fall squarely within normative ethics.

In his contribution, Max Lewis offers a novel defense of moderate pessimism about moral deference. According to Lewis, we have pro tanto reason to avoid moral deference in virtue of the fact that moral deference fails to give us the epistemic credentials to satisfy plausible norms of moral assertion. The argument runs as follows: first, Lewis argues that moral assertions made solely on the basis of deferential moral beliefs violate a plausible epistemic and moral norm against withholding information that one knows, has evidence, or ought to believe will importantly affect another person's deliberation. Furthermore, according to Lewis, not only does moral deference fail to put the audience in a good epistemic position it also puts the audience in a bad epistemic and moral position to assert. That is because there is a tight connection between outright believing something and being disposed to assert it and so deferential moral beliefs often motivate people to assert something that they don't have the epistemic credentials to properly assert. Second, there will often be moral reasons to make assertions—even based on deferential moral beliefs. These assertions, while all-things-considered permissible, will be epistemically impermissible and involve violating a moral norm.

Julian Jonker's article discusses a grounding dilemma for moral principles: Moral philosophy aims at explaining our moral judgments, and so moral theories often issue both moral principles and claims about the moral considerations that ground those principles. In order to

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avoid redundancy, moral principles must go beyond these grounding considerations. But in doing so, principles seem to overgeneralize from the cases that motivate them. According to Jonker, the dilemma is especially for theories that propose that moral principles are grounded in generic reasons that operate in only a subset of the cases covered by the relevant principle, such as contractualism. That is because arguments that motivate the use of generic reasons on the basis of guidance, institutional necessity, or fairness are unsatisfactory. Junker proposes that, instead, we should look at generic interest for justifying the generality of moral principles. A generic interest is an interest that all occupants of a standpoint have in virtue of what occupants of the standpoint as such typically take an interest in. Junker argues that the notion of a generic interest acknowledges a distinction between having and taking an interest, and its use in moral theory is a way of giving expression to the significance of autonomy.

Nicholas Laskowski's contribution develops a novel account of the meaning of the terms 'woman' and 'man,' and argues that it better accounts for the significance of some forms of criticisms of mainstream ideology. In order to do that, the article first engages with contextualism about the meaning of these terms. The terms 'woman' and 'man' appear to live a double life. It seems that speakers use them as sex terms to talk about biological anatomy, such as in medical offices. But it also seems that speakers use 'woman' and 'man' as a gender terms to talk about features of individuals that involve biological anatomy less obviously, e.g. social roles or selfidentifications. One high-profile reaction to this phenomenon is contextualism: on this view, 'woman' and 'man' are sensitive to whichever conversational standards are salient in context. As such, they concern biological or non-biological features depending on context. Laskowski argues that contextualism doesn't exhibit the right kind of flexibility to capture our theoretical intuitions or moral and political practices concerning our uses of these words. He then develops a view on which terms like 'woman' or 'man' are polysemous, and argues that it better explains the data on the ground.

In his paper, Alex Murphy defends the following Parity Principle: if arguments for moral error theory are successful, then so are analogous arguments in favour of error theory about epistemic reasons. To do this, Murphy first presents a two-fold *prima facie* case for the Parity Principle. First, he appeals to apparent evidence that ordinary moral and epistemic discourse are both committed to irreducibly normative reasons. Second, he argues that moral and epistemic reasons are structurally isomorphic. Murphy then considers the work of Jonas Olson, who has argued, against the Parity Principle, that there is in fact a normative disparity between moral and epistemic reasons: the latter but not the former are 'reducible' in the sense that they can be understood in terms of the functional standards constitutive of belief formation. Against this, Murphy argues that Olson's own arguments in favour of moral error theory warrant a rejection of the functional account of epistemic reasons, and that there is anyway no good reason to deny that a plausible functional story could be told about moral reasons. In closing, Murphy brings together the arguments from the paper to present what he calls a Master Argument in favour of the Parity Principle. If sound, moral and epistemic error theory stand (or fall) together.

In his article, Nicholas Smyth argues that much of procreative ethics risks a kind of practical irrelevance because it appears focused on ethical questions only relevant to an abstract or impersonal perspective, and seemingly ignores the kinds of questions that are actually faced by real-life prospective parents. Taking the work of David Benatar and other procreative ethicists as representative examples, Smyth argues that it is far from obvious that many of the key arguments and positions in procreative ethics can or should have practical relevance or authority for would-be parents. Crucially, this seems to be at odds with the point

of applied ethics: to improve the ethical decisions taken by actual agents. In the latter part of the paper, Smyth goes on to argue that the project of having children can often be existentially grounding. That is, it can be the sort of experience that justifies one own life to oneself. This kind of consideration is seemingly of immediate practical importance to those faced with the decision to procreate, even if it isn't best understood as a source of ethical rights or permissions to procreate. Yet, as Smyth contends, it is ignored by procreative ethicists to the detriment of their theories.

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