Editorial

Curie Virág¹

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This issue showcases the diversity of topics, concerns and methods of contemporary ethical inquiry, and the many levels at which theoretical issues and perspectives are intertwined with practice. While no different from its predecessors in this respect, the collection of papers brought together in these pages opens a particular window onto some of the broader methodological and conceptual orientations of the field as it stands. One notable feature is a certain shared awareness of the vast and complex web of forces and agencies within which ethical reasoning is situated, and thus of the degree to which people are drawn together into a world whose contours are both global and pluralistic. Each paper, in its own realm of concern, offers a way of meeting the challenges of this complex reality.

In “Freedom as Non-domination, Robustness, and Distant Threats,” Alexander Bryan considers the meaning and implications of freedom in the face of human vulnerability to forces beyond our control such as global economic institutions, climate change, and environmental devastation. Calling for an account of free citizenship that is equipped to address these complex relations of interdependence, Bryan locates this account in a conception of freedom based on non-domination. Proposed as a measure to be implemented by a plurality of regulatory powers at the national, transnational and global levels, this approach to freedom is geared towards providing better protections to individuals from the arbitrary exercise of power by often distant and unknown sources of interference. Another exploration of ways to mitigate the potential harms of indirect agencies can be found in Constanza Porro’s “Esteem, Social Norms and Status Inequality.” Porro focuses on the violations of people’s status and self-respect that can arise out of systemic conditions that generate the distribution of esteem, and that do not necessarily involve direct institutional mechanisms of subordination or respect violations. Porro argues that, insofar as attributions of esteem can disparage and subordinate those members of the community who are perceived as failing to realize a narrowly defined range of socially norms and values, they are problematic from the point of view of justice.

Approaching the word of social interaction from the perspective of ethical norms. Eva-Maria Düringer addresses one of the most fundamental and pressing problems that lie at the core of interhuman relations: that of achieving understanding of those who are different from us. As she proposes in “The Moral Virtue of Being Understanding,” the quality of being understanding is not simply an “intellectual” or epistemic endeavor, but a moral one as well. Appealing to Iris Murdoch’s philosophy of attention, Düringer observes that

✉ Curie Virág
Curie.Virag@ed.ac.uk

¹ University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

when we value someone for being understanding, it isn't just because she has precisely understood the shortcomings of the other person but because such a person "sees lovingly another person in a difficult situation." Such a capacity requires an attitude of acceptance and appreciation of the other as a real and legitimate being – one that is "as legitimate as being a self." Attention to the predicaments of others as a vital part of recognizing their humanity has important policy implications as well. In "Distinguishing Disadvantage from Ill-Being in the Capability Approach," Sebastian Östlund considers the limits of dominant capability well-being theories which fail to take into account the distinction between not being well and being *unwell*, and thus do not attend to the ways in which people are not only deprived of positive things but are actually afflicted by negative things, such as pain, acute anxiety and long-term stress. Recognizing these negative states, Östlund argues, would allow us to capture a wider range of experiences involved in assessing the actual plight of people in hardship, and to arrive at more sound policy measures for addressing the problems they face.

The reality of human interconnectedness introduces the problem of plurality – of how to manage the disparate subjectivities, perspectives and agencies that come together in a vast and diverse world. What ethical framework should one adopt, given the sheer multiplicity of moral perspectives? How does one make decisions and policies in the face of uncertainty about basic moral facts? What can be done about disagreement? In the case of moral theory, one solution might be to search for a way to identify a common ground so as to harmonize the disagreements. But as Marius Baumann emphasizes in his paper, "In Search of the Trinity: A Dilemma for Parfit's Conciliatory Project," this is far easier said than done. Baumann critiques one famous effort to resolve moral disagreement – Parfit's *On What Matters* – which attempted to save moral realism by arguing that the main traditions of moral theory were ultimately in agreement on "what matters." This endeavour, Baumann argues, was doomed to fail, in large part because Parfit did not acknowledge the distinct explanatory foundations of each of the traditions. Rather than achieving conciliation among competing ethical systems, it dissolved the very disagreements among them by disregarding their differences.

If one must, as Baumann suggests, learn to recognize and accept disagreement, doing so poses significant practical challenges from the point of view of decision-making and policy. How to move forward in the face of disagreement and uncertainty is an issue that Michael Bokoski takes up in the context of distributive justice in "Moral Uncertainty and Distributive Sufficiency." While theorists of distributive justice have forwarded a plurality of approaches, ranging from libertarianism, sufficientarianism, and egalitarianism, uncertainty about moral facts has made it difficult to assess the relative merits of these various proposals. Bokoski argues, however, that it is still possible to adjudicate among them in a way that optimizes choiceworthiness. His assessment is based on a consideration of the competing moral risks of implementing each of the options, which eventually boils down to the option that provides the least risk of causing human harm in the case that the policy is adopted. This option, Bokoski argues, is the modest-threshold sufficiency principle – a principle that, even in the face of widespread disagreement about which first-order theory of justice to adopt, can satisfy the demands of not causing harm and providing sufficient resources for ensuring overall well-being.

Two other papers explore solutions to practical dilemmas that may arise within pluralistic communities. In the case of how parents can make ethically sound decisions about what to feed their children, Daniel Butt proposes in "Corrupting the Youth: Should Parents Feed their Children Meat?" that, even in the face of disagreement about one's ultimate moral standpoint regarding whether or not meat-eating is ethical, a consideration of the moral

integrity of one's children and of possible future regret on their part entails a parental obligation to refrain from feeding meat to their children. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen's "The Problem(s) of Constituting the Demos: A (Set of) Solution(s)" explores a quite different but related predicament in democratic theory, where the question of who constitutes the demos has been taken by many to be "an embarrassment to democratic theory." Arguing that various versions of this question are solvable, Lippert-Rasmussen concludes that it poses no fundamental threat to democracy or for democratic theory, and that "what makes democracy valuable determines what is the proper demos for making collective decisions."

The remaining papers to be mentioned offer proposals in a number of distinct contexts in which rethinking the relevant variables can be helpful for managing the considerable range of uncertainties present in real-life situations. Kritika Maheshwari's "On the Harm of Imposing Risk of Harm" addresses a widely-accepted view of the harms posed by pure risk, namely, that "imposing pure risks is harmful when and because risk itself is harmful." The issue is of clear and significant practical relevance, given that the awareness and management of risk is an ever-present feature of everyday life for most people, and given also the policy implications for governments, insurances companies, and other institutions concerned with assessing and responding to risk. Maheshwari introduces a significant distinction between Constitutive and Contingent claims about risk and argues that it is only some cases of the latter where risk can be shown to be harmful. And finally, in "The Timing of Research Consent," Benjamin Sachs draws attention to an important problem in the conducting of research studies, namely, the troubles that can arise from the current practice of securing blanket consent from participants. Such consent, Sachs observes, is problematic because it requires participants to waive all claims at a single point in time, before they have been given enough information to make an informed decision about whether or not to waive future interventions. Sachs' proposed alternative to eliminate the practice of blanket consent, and to adopt a procedure in which participants only waive their claims immediately before an intervention, would be favourable to all the parties involved, and thus make for more sound policy.

In these anxious times, when the ongoing global pandemic, an increasingly urgent climate crisis, widespread political instability, and the large-scale dislocation of populations have made people acutely aware of the extent to which their lives and actions are interconnected with those of countless others across the world, there has been a pervasive sense that human life is imbued with complexity and uncertainty. The papers that appear in the pages that follow – including our book reviews – show that, while confronting this world has exposed human vulnerabilities to many important challenges, so too has it pointed towards a more expansive range of possibilities for navigating them.